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# CANCELLED BONDS

BY

HENRY CRESSWELL

AUTHOR OF

“A MODERN GREEK HEROINE,” “A WOMAN’S AMBITION,”  
“A WILY WIDOW,” “SLIDING SANDS,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# WORKS BY HENRY CRESSWELL.

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## *NOVELS.*

A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.

FAIR AND FREE.

INCOGNITA.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

THE SURVIVORS.

A WILY WIDOW.

MY LORD OTHELLO.

SLIDING SANDS.

THE HERMITS OF CRIZEBECK.

FAIREST OF THREE.

A WOMAN'S AMBITION.

DISINHERITED.

BROKEN FORTUNES.

A PRECIOUS SCAMP.

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## *DRAMA.*

THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND.

IN DANGER.

(By HENRY CRESSWELL and W. LESTOCQ.)

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## CANCELLED BONDS.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE funeral was over. For a few days there had been at Belmont a large but gloomy house-party of relatives, distant ones on Mr. Peyton's side, but nearer ones on the side of his wife. Amongst them all had taken place some discussion respecting the interment of the dead woman in the Peyton family vault in the little country churchyard in Leicestershire; but the general view had been favourable to Mr. Peyton's decision that his wife should

be buried where she died. Of Mr. Peyton's reasons for resolving that she should not be interred with his ancestors no one had any suspicion.

Now the whole family party were again dispersed. Some of Mr. Peyton's relations had carried Eleanor off with them for a month, to give her a change which she much needed. And then Mrs. Torres wrote from town to invite Rosamond to come to her, and Mr. Peyton and Lennox remained at Belmont alone. Already a deep repose had settled down on Belmont, the characteristic, eventless repose of a home in which there are no womenfolk, and in another ten days the house would be quieter still, for Lennox would have taken his departure for Oxford.

At present—without either Rosamond or Eleanor to make any demands upon his time—Lennox was reading hard all day,

in preparation for the ensuing term ; and he and his father seldom met except at meals.

Mr. Peyton sat much in his own room, alone in his arm-chair by the fireside, occupied with his private reflections, as he had been that evening when his wife died.

That something which had so often made him anxious of mien, those cares which had become graver since he had come to live at Belmont, the secret of which Eleanor, distressed to see him growing sadder, had once suggested that it might be well to speak 'to some one,' had become now a secret for ever. He might guess, but he could never know. He had been able to learn nothing ! After all, nothing ! Even at the last moment, the moment at which he had always promised himself that his wife would make a con-

fession, even then he had elicited nothing. And now he must never hope to discover the truth ; must satisfy himself, if he could, with his old suspicions and vague speculations, with strange rambling hypotheses that had no real evidence to support them : for no thinking could ever advance them one step farther. Truly he had been a wronged, ill-treated man !

As he reflected upon it, the shadow of melancholy on his grave face deepened, and his expression of stern resolution grew harder.

At least he was free. If he could not know, he could act. It was a relief to resolve that he would act. And then again he asked himself,

‘That bookish lad ! How will he behave ? Shall I wait ? Shall I leave it till Christmas—until he becomes accustomed to the loss of his mother ?—No, I cannot.

I must act. I must speak to him before his return to Oxford.'

One morning at breakfast he said to his son,

'I want to talk to you, Lennox—matters of business. Could you come to me a little before eleven?'

'Certainly, sir.'

At a quarter-to-eleven Lennox presented himself in Mr. Peyton's sanctum. Mr. Peyton sat by the fire looking pensively at the curling flames. The paper he had been reading had fallen on the floor at his side, and it seemed to Lennox that it might have been lying there some time. His father, as he entered, had asked without moving,

'Is that you, Lennox?'

His grave mien was more than usually serious.

'I don't know whether we had not better

leave this till to-morrow, after all,' he said, moving at last. 'No, we will get it over. Sit down.'

He pointed to the chair his son should occupy, and himself rose, crossed to the window, and for a minute or two stood looking at the rain, which was falling softly. He seemed unable to resolve upon beginning what he had to say.

Something of more than ordinary import was evidently to come. Lennox wondered what it might be. Waiting, he looked around the room, which, unlike the rooms at the old home in Leicestershire, had an air of bareness and want of comfort, such as a room might have in a lodging-house or an inn.

Mr. Peyton returned to the hearth.

'What I have to say, Lennox, is painful—in the last degree,' he began. 'I say this to prepare you.'



The remark appeared to require no reply, and the younger man made none.

His father leaned his shoulders against the chimney-piece.

‘There are no subjects more disagreeable than family troubles,’ he began again, after another pause, not looking at his son, but across the room at the wall opposite him: ‘and when those troubles are of the most terrible sort possible—as this one is of which I have to speak—everyone naturally shrinks from them. You will understand me: I have things to say of a most painful kind.’

‘I am sorry to hear it, sir.’

‘Only—as I must speak,’ continued his father, taking no notice of his remark, ‘I am going to speak plainly, Lennox—as man to man. As I might speak if you and I were strangers.’

Lennox Peyton bent his head. His

father was looking at him then. He was looking at him, and taking note of his face—of the hollow cheeks, and their thin sharp lines, of the dull outline of the lips, of the general look of fatigue that early ill-health had left impressed on his features, of the deep dark eyes, so like his sister's, fixed on himself with anxious attention, and of the keen light of ability and intelligence so perceptible in every trait.

‘I am going to marry again, Lennox,’ he said. ‘I do not mean, of course, that I am already engaged to any woman; nor that I have any views at present respecting the woman whom I shall marry. I mean only that I intend to marry again—and before long. You and your sister are of an age to feel very uncomfortable at the idea of having a stepmother, I know that. And I am going to speak to you of my reasons for this second marriage.’

‘Neither my sister nor I, sir, have any right to give an opinion on that subject—and I, at least, should not think of doing so. Should my sister say anything, I hope that you would make some allowance for the proneness of a young girl to speak of what passes in her mind—perhaps with too little consideration of what she says.’

He spoke as a man might have spoken who was a good many years older, and the fact impressed his father. He was thinking,

‘The young fellow has his good points. He has his very good points.’

Aloud he said,

‘I should make allowances. It is my wish, it has been always my wish, to behave to you and your sister with perfect justice. But,’—he made a sign that he did not wish to be interrupted, for Lennox was on the point of speaking,—‘that is not the present question.’

‘Lennox,’ he recommenced, after a short pause; and it seemed to his son that there was a touch of kindness or at least of sorrow in his voice, ‘if what I must say is painful to you, it is most humiliating to me.—I had a very unhappy life with your mother. I ought never to have married her. Unfortunately, it is so much easier to know that after marriage than before—and I had no suspicion of it before we were married. That was not your mother’s fault: it was my own—my want of perception. Yeung men are but little observant of the characters of the girls they wish to marry. Their homage is won by a few traits that charm them, and they do not think of the future. That will always be so. But the qualities that charm in the girl may become ridiculous in the wife, and odious in the woman of maturer years. Our characters do not alter much, Lennox.

We bring them into the world with us ; inherit them, I suppose : and age modifies but does not change them. An empty-headed lass becomes an empty-headed woman, and a weak girl a weak wife. Beware of weakness, Lennox. A woman's weakness moves a man to offer her his protection, and he learns only too late that the person in need of protection is himself. But I am not going to unfold a story of how soon your mother and I found ourselves unsuited to each other. That passed long ago ; and I would that were all. We had—for a long time—no children, as you know.'

It struck Lennox, listening attentively, that a shade of hesitation was perceptible in his father's voice, which he did not understand. But Mr. Peyton continued,

' Your mother, in consequence, found herself unoccupied and dull. She was

disappointed too, and so was I. I was both disappointed and distressed, as the last man of a long line might be. Then your mother presented me with yourself and your sister. You are my heir, and if you have always supposed that you would succeed to the family estates, and to my wealth, which you know is considerable, you have anticipated no more than you are entitled to anticipate. What I have to say to you is very hard on you. I know that. If you will believe me, I also regret it. But it is also, Lennox, most humiliating to me.'

He stopped, and Lennox Peyton remained silent. The turn which the close of his father's speech had taken was altogether inexplicable to him. The only interpretation of it that he could perceive was some wish on Mr. Peyton's part to leave everything to his favourite niece ; a

design which Rosamond had not hesitated to predict on more occasions than one. But seeing that he, Lennox, was to marry Eleanor, it was difficult to believe that his father was really meditating a disposition of his property so absolutely purposeless: whilst there seemed to be no connection between such designs, if they existed, and this second marriage which was the subject at present under discussion.

Mr. Peyton meanwhile had moved to the table, and unlocking a drawer took out a couple of books of largish size which he placed upon it.

From within the cover of one of them he drew out an envelope and handed it to his son.

‘These,’ he said, ‘are copies of portraits of yourself and your sister. The earliest were taken when you were little children, the last, as you will remember, compara-

tively recently. In this volume,—he touched one of the books,—‘you will find photographs of myself, my father and mother, my uncles and aunts, my parents and grandparents, even of great grandparents. I have had them recently taken from the portraits at home—almost all of which are familiar to you—for a particular reason. I want you to take the photographs of yourself and your sister, and to compare them—most carefully—with the others, and to see if you can discover any family likeness anywhere. I have made the comparison within the last few days, and I find none. Take your time.’

He returned to his arm-chair, and sat there waiting, unoccupied, whilst Lennox sat down at the table to do as he was requested.

A heavy silence fell upon the room—only the flames flickered in the grate, and



the sound of the rain falling outside became audible, whilst now and then Mr. Peyton could hear the younger man turn a page, as he proceeded slowly, scrupulously with his investigation.

Of what did he think as he sat seeking, all in vain, for a trait of his own or his sister's features in the portraits of his ancestors. He himself hardly knew.

It was long before he had concluded.

‘Well?’ asked Mr. Peyton.

‘I agree with you. I see no resemblance.’

He was conscious that he was making an admission that was in some way to prove disadvantageous to his sister and to himself, though in what way he had as yet no definite conception. But to combat the conclusion at which his father had arrived was impossible: and he frankly confessed the truth, simply because it was the truth.

‘Only,’ he added, ‘should not a similar comparison be instituted between these portraits and those of my mother’s family?’

‘In justice, undoubtedly. Look at the other volume. You will find it less perfect; but it is as complete as I have been able to make it.’

Lennox took up the other volume, and again silence reigned in the room, save for the flickering of the flames, the soft falling of the rain outside, and the occasional sound of the turn of a page.

Lennox turned his chair round.

‘No. I see no resemblance,’ he said.

‘But, you know, children resemble one or other of their parents, or one of their grandparents. They resemble some one—if only a little.’

Lennox rose, and went back to the chair which he had previously occupied. Replies, many of them, crossed his brain

one after another ; only he perceived the futility of them as fast as they suggested themselves.

Of course there was an explanation, an evident one. But that he would not admit. He would not even think of it.

His father regarded him. He was not looking at the fire, as Mr. Peyton himself had done ; but his brows were knitted, and his thin hollow face was full of the concentrated thought of a man accustomed to the exercise of close reasoning.

And Mr. Peyton reflected,

‘Who ever saw any one of my family engaged in thought look like that?’

‘I have seen this complete dissimilarity between yourself, Lennox, and your sister, and my family, and my wife’s family, for years. I have seen it defining itself more distinctly each year as you and your sister have advanced from childhood to

young-manhood and young-womanhood.'

'It has never struck me until to-day,' replied the younger man. 'My sister and I are not much alike, although we are twins.'

'About the eyes and forehead—and in the colour of your hair?'

Lennox took from the table the loose photograph of Rosamond and himself.

'You are right. There the resemblance is striking,' he admitted, again laying down the portraits.

'You observe the seriousness of this, Lennox?' asked Mr. Peyton.

'I am asking myself whether you have anything else to tell me, sir.'

'I have. You know where you and your sister were born?'

'In London. Mother was staying with friends, was she not?'

'She was staying with your grandmother

in Brompton. That was not your grandmother's home. She was just then changing house, and was living for a few weeks in apartments. It all happened whilst I was absent from home. I had gone to Queensland to visit my sister, Eleanor's mother. Her husband had bought an estate in the colony, expecting to realise a large fortune, but soon found himself in difficulties, and I went to afford my sister what assistance I could. The first mail that reached me brought me the intelligence that my wife believed that she might become a mother. I was absent from home altogether a little over six months, and you and your sister were born before my return. Well, you will say all that was possible enough. At the time I myself had no suspicions of any kind. I had long wished to have children, and I was delighted. It was only afterwards that I

began to entertain suspicions and misgivings. On my return home I was immediately struck by those dark eyes of yours and your sister's, so unlike any in my family or your mother's. I remember that I spoke of them to your mother a day or two after my return home, and was surprised at her seeming to be embarrassed by my remarks. But my first uneasiness was not occasioned by your remarkable unlikeness to all members of both families. It was occasioned by some singularities in your mother's behaviour which struck me as inexplicable. I observed that she seemed continually apprehensive of something, and was always watching me, more particularly when I paid a visit to the nursery, or when you and your sister were mentioned between us. For a long time I imagined that her nervousness was a consequence of her having not yet en-

tirely recovered her strength, but was compelled to dismiss that hypothesis when I found that her habitual disquietude, and evident misgivings about something connected with you, rather increased than diminished. When I spoke to her on the subject, she was almost overcome with terror. Afterwards I remarked that her alarms increased, although she was evidently making great efforts to prevent my perceiving them. I did not speak to anyone of these things; for I did not know what to say.'

After pausing for a moment, he continued,

'Meanwhile, you were no longer babies; and as you grew older, and were occasionally presented to visitors, people began to ask one another, as they do when little children are shown them, "Whom are they like?" Already I could see no trait in

either of you—you were then much more alike than you are now—that I could trace to any member of your mother's family, or of my own ; whilst I perceived, in the gradual moulding of your features, the development of a type that was to me entirely strange. I also found that the remotest allusion to the subject terrified your mother, who already began to shrink from my society, and also to evince a dislike to having you and your sister near her, that seemed to me almost inexplicable. You will, I think, admit that under such circumstances my suspicions were not unreasonably aroused ; that I might be pardoned for entertaining suspicions.'



## CHAPTER II.

HE waited as if for Lennox to reply, but the latter seeming to prefer for the present only to listen, he asked,

‘ Shall I continue ?’

‘ It will be better, will it not, for all that is to be said, to be said now ?’

‘ You will not think it strange that, under such circumstances, I at length resolved to make some inquiries. I may tell you at once that they resulted in nothing.’

A look of relief was perceptible in the younger man’s face, lifted to his father’s

a moment before with poignant anxiety.

‘Your grandmother was dead, though perhaps I could not have hoped to learn anything from her, any more than from your mother. But I could not help feeling that, even in the want of evidence of any tangible kind, there was strong evidence, of an intangible kind, of the reasonableness of my suspicion. None of my servants had accompanied your mother to town. None of them had heard, previously to her departure, of any hopes that she might become a mother. Our own medical man had heard nothing of it. Your grandmother had some old servants. But one of them left her shortly before your mother came to town, and the others did not accompany her to her temporary apartments. I myself visited that house—or I should rather say attempted to do so. I found it had been pulled down.

The woman who had let the apartments had gone abroad, or was dead. I could not ascertain which. I could find no servants who had been with your grandmother in that house. I could not discover the name of the medical man who attended your mother. I once asked her who he was. She informed me that she had forgotten his name. He had been summoned hastily. Her mother might have remembered. But you see your grandmother was dead. Few people are more convenient to refer to, under certain circumstances, than the dead.

‘So the years passed on. Your mother and I became completely estranged. But I need not tell you about that. And you and your sister grew up—as unlike your mother or me, or anyone connected with either of us, as it was possible for you to be. Remember, Lennox,’—he abruptly

altered his hard tone to one that was almost gentle :—‘ none of this was your fault, or your sister’s. I have always exculpated you. Howsoever much I may have resented the gross wrong which I firmly believe to have been done me by your mother, I have tried on every occasion to remember that you two children were innocent, and that it would be a gross injustice to punish you for deeds in which you could have had no part. To remember that has not been always easy, and I may not have succeeded as perfectly as, in common justice, I could wish ; but I have laboured at least to be just to you and your sister. But that is by the way. I have not yet told you all. During all these years I have hoped that I might at least some day learn the truth. I have thought that an accident might disclose it : though that is now no longer likely ; and I

have also always believed that, should I survive your mother, she would at the last, before she died—when her secret could no longer be of any moment to her—make a confession to me. All that I have suspected she guessed long ago : and I am convinced that remorse and fear of possible consequences have had far more to do with her death than any merely physical causes. During her last illness I made an appeal to her. And just before her death she sent for me to see her alone. Whether she intended to make me an avowal, and found her courage unequal to it, or was already too far exhausted to know distinctly what she was doing, I am unable to say. I can only tell you that to the last she persistently refused to open her lips on this subject ; and that I feel compelled to see in that persistence only one more evidence of the truth of my suspicions.'

Mr. Peyton ceased speaking, and a long silence followed. Lennox sat thinking. When he at last looked up it was not to speak.

Mr. Peyton's eyes met his, as if he had been watching to see him make some movement, as if he had desired to leave him ample time for thought before proceeding further.

He now spoke at once.

'This unfortunate woman, Lennox, is dead. She was my wife and your mother. You will not require me to put my suspicions into words; to say that it would be equally painful for me to speak and for you to hear.'

'No, no : that is not necessary.'

He spoke in a kind of dream. He was in a waking dream; lost in a complete bewilderment where the natural connection of things with one another had ceased,

where there was no beginning, nor middle, nor end, only an eddy of dizzy thought. Loaded with the burden of an overwhelming shame, he seemed himself to be overcome by the heavy horror of some vision of the night, in which the sleeper with black rocks descending upon him, or the earth opening to fiery abysses beneath his sinking feet, attempts to flee impending death and finds his paralysed limbs no longer obedient to his will. Only the dream, though so confused, had meaning, and the dismay elicited feelings of a nobler sort than fears. At last he began to understand all his own and all his sister's history, his mother's fear of them both, and his father's—if he might still call him father—ill-concealed antipathy; the preference shown to a stranger; and the isolation to which they had been condemned. Only, who were really the

strangers? Each moment Mr. Peyton's conduct was rising higher in his estimation. 'I tried to remember that you two children were innocent!' The words rang in his ears, and the tone almost of apology in which he had continued, 'To remember that was not always easy. I may not have succeeded as perfectly as, in common justice, I should wish. But I have laboured at least to be just to you and your sister,'—to the two intruders thrust upon an outraged man! And one of his first lucid reflections was,

'I ought to thank him—if I could only find words to speak of anything connected with this.'

He understood, too, why his father would marry again. He ought to marry again, to have a son of his own. It was the merest common justice to an injured man to hope that he would have one.



His sister? What would her fate be? His own was of no importance. With the education that had been bestowed upon him, with a liberality so undeserved, he could always earn his bread.

The elder man waited, respecting his stunned silence. It did not surprise him. He had hardly anticipated anything else.

At last Lennox looked up again.

‘I think I ought to say, sir, that it is very good of you to have spoken to me of all this.’

‘I have spoken—because I want your help.’

‘You may justly claim it, sir.’

‘You understand, of course,’ said Mr. Peyton, in his grave tone, ‘why I shall marry again. I hope that this time I may have children of my own. If I had, I need not say that I should wish them to have the family estates. Only, you are

my heir. This is very hard on you, Lennox.'—His voice softened.—'And I am well aware that I am asking for a sacrifice that you might reasonably feel indisposed to make. There are settlements, those cannot be touched. There is also an entail. That I cannot cut off without your consent: but, with your consent to cut it off, I could will my estates to another son. If you refuse you are quite within your rights. Then all I could leave to a second family would be only what I might be able to save for them—and could not include the estates. I do not know what you will think of all this: except that you will probably agree with me that we should avoid anything like disclosures.'

'At any price.'

Mr. Peyton rose and stood again before the fire.

‘Then, I am waiting for your answer, Lennox.’

Lennox rested his thin cheek upon his hand, and thought. He was conscious of having in his hands other interests besides his own. At last, looking up, he said,

‘I was, of course, sir, altogether unprepared for all that you have told me.—I seem to myself hardly now to be able to realise what I have heard—involving my mother, my sister, and myself in—in—I do not know what I ought to say. Will you allow me twenty-four hours—just to think?’

‘Certainly.—We will say no more about this until to-morrow.’

Lennox rose. Mr. Peyton was already occupied in replacing in the drawer the two volumes of family portraits. Lennox felt that he himself wished to say something more to him before leaving the room;

but he was unable to frame his thoughts into any shape, and so reached the door, opened it, and passed out, with some painful consciousness of having entered the room one man and leaving it another.

He went to the library, and sat down by the window, but his first glance was bestowed upon his work lying upon the table ; the studies he had quitted to go to the library to speak of the ‘ business matters ’ his father had mentioned.

His eyes rested with affection on his books. At least they did not change. The works of the great authors of antiquity, and of the great scholars of recent generations, when once a man had made acquaintance with them, they were his friends for ever. Fortunes or hopes might perish, cities or whole nations be swept away, even languages succumb to all-

destroying time, but the books remained, friends that never changed, citadels of refuge from the restlessness of the world that would never be cast down.

It was with the sense of feeling already a stronger man than he was when he quitted Mr. Peyton, that he turned his eyes towards the view outside.

The rain fell still ; a heavy, slow down-pour, dull, monotonous, dispiriting : a day to inspire leaden thoughts, had none been provided him.

What things was he going to say to his father on the morrow ?

He had but a short time for thought before luncheon. At luncheon he learned that Mr. Peyton had just ordered the brougham to drive him to the railway-station. He had already taken a hurried luncheon, and would not return until after dinner.

‘He is leaving me alone to think,’ said Lennox to himself.

In the afternoon, the wind rising a little, the rain ceased, though the sky continued to be overcast.

Lennox strolled out of the house and wandered in the grounds. His thoughts were beginning to shape themselves, and he imagined that he would be able to pursue his meditations more easily in the open air.

The autumn woods seemed sad. Their tints were this year less picturesque than usual. The fierce winds of the close of September had treated the trees cruelly, and brought down much of the foliage before the natural fall. What little leafage remained on the boughs was fast perishing. The limes and ashes were almost bare, and every gust of wind blew off them a little shower of leaves that fell,

not to dance before the wind, but to drop, heavy with moisture, upon the dark, mouldering masses already beaten down on the earth by the rain. Even the elms had changed colour before their time; and, where they were at all exposed, were covered with a soft, pale yellow. The oaks were all russet, and the chestnuts not touched as usual with gorgeous dashes of light and dark red, gold and orange, where frosts had bitten some exposed bough, but, with few leaves left, losing their hue in dull, unvaried tints, almost as monotonous as those of the oaks, that lent little harmony or contrast of colour to the woods. Over all hung a chill of the cold, heavy rain of the morning, a dampness of earth and air that, under the overcast sky, struck dispiritingly upon the senses.

Lennox Peyton was conscious of it—of

an universal air of monotony and dejection all about him in the grey lights, whilst the spots which he traversed awakened memories calculated to deepen the melancholy of his thoughts. This was the path along which he had last walked with his mother; here he had stood watching his sister feed the water-fowl; in this seat under the trees Eleanor and he had talked together of their future. That day, too, Eleanor had spoken of some deeper shadow of care upon his father's face since they had come to Belmont. How little any of them had suspected the cause! And now what was he to think about his mother? What to say to his father? What to plan for Rosamond? How bitterly she had resented already her position in her father's house! Was it possible to foresee how a great shame would work upon the darker moods of her nature? Was it conceivable



that she too, like himself, would be able to see something noble and dignified in the simple justice which Mr. Peyton had striven to dispense to her and her brother?

‘Never!’ he said to himself. ‘Never! To see such a thing is not in her nature. She could not see it if she tried.’

Then, what would ensue?

But he thought also of Eleanor. He was glad she was not here. Appearances must be thought of, as well as mere business details. And his reflections ran somewhat thus,

‘Let me suppose. The entail is cut off, and other matters arranged in a way just to father. He marries again and has a son. I also am married to Eleanor, and we have a son. Why have I agreed that father should cut off the entail? Why do I raise no protest against the family pro-

perty passing to a younger son? What will my wife say about my disregard of the rights of *her* child?’

He seemed in danger of laying up in the present a store of unhappiness for the future.

Then his meditations led to other reflections.

Was he not clinging to impossibilities—because they were dear to him. Men overtaken by great calamities should do what was urgent, and reckon nothing of all the rest. When they did not, they only plunged more deeply still into complications and disaster.

And old doubts reawakened in him; those fears which he had so often entertained that his engagement to his cousin was altogether a wrong, a selfish action, the suspicion that, instead of being so forward to secure his own happiness, he

should have been contented to love his cousin if he must, but to conceal his love for his sister's sake, and to devote himself wholly to her. Where so many were so unhappy, should one have hesitated to sacrifice himself for the sake of the rest ?

Now he had to think not only of Eleanor, but also of his mother, who was dead. He had a memory to shield, as well as a life to cherish.

Where, beside charges so sacred, was a place for self ?

When evening fell he turned homewards, making his way through the gathering gloom of the woods, under the dark, dying leaves that fell mournfully about him, past the darkening ponds, with a heart as full of shadows as the grey scenes he traversed.

He had still come to no resolution ; but, at any rate, he had surveyed his situation.

Upon reaching the library he lit his reading-lamp, and sat down. After so long a time devoted to weariful thoughts, he would refresh himself before dinner with an hour or so of his favourite study.

But he sat with the book on his knees. His attention was difficult to fix. His thoughts reverted of themselves to his perplexities, and his eyes traversed the page without his being conscious of the words he read.

Suddenly an idea struck him.

‘I am really master of the situation. My consent is indispensable to the accomplishment of all father’s plans. I am in a position to make terms.’

That seemed to simplify his difficulties.

## CHAPTER III.

‘SHALL I see you about eleven, Lennox?’ asked Mr. Peyton, the next morning.

‘If that will suit you, sir.’

‘Certainly.’

As the hour approached, Mr. Peyton awaited his son’s appearance with anxiety. Never since he first began to entertain the suspicions that tormented him had there been a time when Lennox had seemed to him of so much importance. He found himself speculating what kind of reply ‘the boy’ would give, and attempted to form conjectures from what he knew of

his character. But to do that was impossible. He was entirely unacquainted with the young man's character ; and was, indeed, a little surprised by the discovery of how completely Lennox was a stranger to him, although they had for two-and-twenty years stood in the relation of father and son living under the same roof.

‘Of the two, I seem to know the girl better—simply because she has given me more trouble,’ reflected Mr. Peyton.

Lennox presented himself punctually, and took again the same seat which his father had pointed to him the previous morning. Only this time it was his turn to speak first.

‘I have given the most serious consideration, sir, to all that you yesterday told me.’

‘Thank you. I am anxious to learn the decision at which you have arrived.’

‘First, sir, I desire to say that I feel very deeply grateful to you for the consideration with which my sister and myself have been treated, notwithstanding the misgivings which you have felt—I am saying nothing about those misgivings, sir—only that, as you did entertain them, your liberality to my sister and myself under the circumstances must always command my profoundest respect.’

‘I desired to be just. You and your sister had done nothing,’ replied Mr. Peyton, holding himself in one of his erect attitudes, and bending his head with a little dignified acknowledgment of the expressions used.

In himself he was saying,

‘Gentlemanly, and guarded. His education has not been thrown away. I am not at all sure, though, what is to follow.’

He was not kept long in waiting.

‘ You were kind enough, sir,’ continued Lennox, ‘ to be perfectly open with me yesterday, respecting your intention of marrying again, and about some other matters. Regarding some of them, it would be impertinent of me to have any opinions. But there were others in which you made certain proposals to me.’

‘ Let us come to them.’

‘ By all means. I should like to meet your wishes, sir—if you could see your way to taking into consideration one or two points—not unreasonable ones, as I hope to persuade you.’

Mr. Peyton thought in himself,

‘ Terms. Well, I suppose that was to be anticipated. The question is what they are.’

It did not escape him how enormous an advantage his son at the present moment



possessed in the circumstance, that for some years past the relations between them had been, by his (Mr. Peyton's) own choice, less that of father and son, than of two gentlemen of different ages, on politely distant terms with each other.

‘ You must let me hear,’ he said aloud, in a voice from which nothing definite could be gathered.

‘ I am going to ask then first, sir, that as I have always called you father, I trust I may be allowed to do so. I might urge, in favour of my request, the desire, which we share equally, that any arrangements we shall make may be such as may entirely preclude disclosures or any danger of disclosures. Only, I should very much prefer to name the real reason of my request, my consciousness of the paternal consideration which my sister and

I have received at your hands. My request would extend, of course, to my sister as well as to myself.'

Mr. Peyton remained silent for a minute or two. He felt the cogency of the first reason that had been alleged for the request made him, and was not altogether untouched by the gratitude implied in the second. He could see too in the dark eyes of the younger man opposite him, and in his thin, hollow-cheeked, almost ascetic face, how real the sentiments were which he had expressed, though they had been worded with all the caution and precision of a logician. But his experience of a man of the world made him dislike an unconditional acquiescence in the first of the terms put before him. Unfortunately, he could not see how he was to refuse with either sense or dignity.

'Yes : that seems a matter of course,'

he said at last; desiring by the form of his assent to discount its value as much as possible.

‘Thank you. What I have to ask next will appear, I know, more difficult to grant—yet I think I am entitled to ask it, and, if you please, I shall ask it.’

Mr. Peyton felt the full importance of having commenced with a surrender. Still he said,

‘I am listening.’

‘You have no doubt that mother was my mother?’

‘None.’

‘I am entitled, sir, to defend my mother’s memory. The evidence which you yesterday placed before me consisted partly of inferences drawn from personal appearances, partly of misgivings which you may, I admit, have seemed to yourself to have reason to entertain, and partly

from conclusions drawn from my mother's own behaviour at different times. I wish to submit, sir, that none of this evidence is of a conclusive character: that you must yourself admit that, though you have grounds for suspicions, you are not able to adduce any actual evidence to show that your suspicions may not be based upon some mistake. I have given all you told me my most serious consideration. I have also felt myself compelled to set on the other side my personal knowledge of my mother, and the opinion of her which I am led to conclude from it. If you would reply that filial piety alone prevents me from sharing your misgivings, I must beg that my filial piety may claim your respect. And I ask, therefore, that, though you have misgivings, it shall be agreed between us that you may be mistaken.'

‘I am sure that I am not,’ replied Mr. Peyton on the spot.

‘I know, sir. And I might reply—excuse my saying so, we must be plain with each other—I might reply, that I am sure you are mistaken. Only on those terms we shall never reach any mutual understanding. I ask for a doubt.’

Mr. Peyton rose, and stood with his back to the fire.

‘And if I cannot accede?’ he asked.

‘We can take time to consider it, sir. There is no occasion, I imagine, for our concluding everything to-day.’

‘That means, you know, that you will not meet my wishes, until I give you your doubt.’

Lennox was silent.

‘I am entitled to ask,’ said Mr. Peyton, ‘whether, seeing what I have done for

you after the way I was treated by your mother——’

He stopped. He was himself conscious of the *petitio principii* he was making.

‘But I claim a doubt,’ said Lennox.

Mr. Peyton turned, and, drawing himself up in his erect way, looked straight at him.

‘Where did you learn this, Lennox?’ he said. ‘You know this is fence of no common kind.’

‘Whatsoever I know, sir, I have learned by your liberality. I have no desire to fence. I claim only that my mother was my mother, and that I feel as her son.’

‘There is more in those books that you are always reading, boy, than some people reckon for,’ remarked Mr. Peyton, with conviction.

Lennox smiled.

‘They are open to all who choose to consult them,’ he said.

Mr. Peyton was thinking. He was a bit proud of the fellow. At least he was a credit to his upbringing.

‘I presume that if I refuse the doubt we can go no further?’ he asked.

‘I am defending my mother.’

‘Only, how am I to admit a doubt, when I have no doubt?’ enquired Mr. Peyton.

‘I also have no doubt. We meet each other half way.’

‘On those terms, then—I admit the doubt. You are a casuist of no mean order, Lennox. Have you yet anything else to ask?’

Mr. Peyton asked the question in the tone of a man beforehand prepared to yield. He had realised the strength of his adversary, and that whatsoever terms were proposed he would have to accede to them.

‘One thing more only: and this is al-

most a consequence of what we have arranged already. I desire that my sister may never know anything of these doubts. I think that her sex entitles her to this consideration. But, whether you are of that opinion or not, I would beg that of all this which has passed between us, not a breath, not a suspicion, may ever reach her ears. I have nothing else to ask.'

'On these terms, Lennox, you are prepared to accede to my proposals?'

'On these terms I am prepared to do more, sir; to assist you, to the best of my ability, to transmit the family estates to an heir of whose parentage there shall be no doubt, in such a manner as shall preclude all suspicions of any doubts or difficulties ever having arisen.'

'You are aware that you will be disinheriting yourself, Lennox?'

'I am fully aware of what I am doing,



sir. But I am not disinheriting myself. I have in the education which you have given me a heritage that is not alienable, and am desirous to show you that I am grateful for the gift.'

For a minute Mr. Peyton stood silent, holding his head erect, and looking at the wall opposite him. He was thinking,

'I am sorry for the fellow. He is behaving too well. If only I were not certain.'

Aloud he said,

'You are a fine fellow, Lennox. I quite agree with you about your sister. She shall be spared hearing anything about this. You have amply deserved that she should. I am prepared to go even farther, if you wish it—if there is anything else you would like to ask. I do wish to behave well to you and your sister. You are treating me very honourably—very honourably.'

‘Thank you very much, sir, for saying so.’

‘Then, the business part of the affair shall be arranged. We need not hurry about that. The entail will be cut off. I shall marry again, and if I have a son, Lennox, the property will go to him.’

‘Quite so. Only—there is a point of detail which I should like to mention.’—A shade of hesitation was perceptible in his voice.—‘I feel a little embarrassed about this.—I wish to behave as a gentleman should.—And I do not quite know what you wish.—And I may say that I am really attached to my cousin—I mean Eleanor, of course. Only—I have been thinking. If you would not mind following me.—I am aware that these are only suppositions.—But, suppose that I and my cousin marry : that I have a son ?’

‘You will not be badly off, Lennox.

There is the settlement. And I should not be forgetful of your behaviour at the present juncture. Eleanor will have this place. A few days will settle that now; and she has a fortune of her own.'

'I am thinking of none of those things, sir,' replied Lennox, slowly, with his eyes on the ground. 'I am thinking that when your property goes to your second son—I have misgivings about what will be said—by Eleanor—by my sister—by the world at large. No explanation will be possible; and people will talk. Your disposition of the property will be canvassed, and suspicions of all sorts awakened. I mean'—he looked up—'to put it briefly, that my marriage seems to me a complication.'

'In a way,' admitted Mr. Peyton. 'Only, I fear, an inevitable one. I am a fair man, Lennox. Or, at least, I hope that I am a fair man. I could not, would not,

go so far as to expect you not to marry.'

'Only, you see, the mere fact of my not marrying would not be an explanation. That I was a bachelor would not of itself constitute a reason why I should not be your heir. In the ordinary course of things, the family estates would pass to a second son only in the event of my dying without children.'

'Granted.'

'To be altogether satisfactory, what is going to be done should appear natural to everyone. There should be some reason for your not leaving your property to me which all the world would at once understand.'

'I see, of course, the desirability of some such arrangement. But I do not see what it could be.'

'I am thinking,' replied Lennox, pensively, 'of my mother and of my sister.'

It would be only right, too, that I should think of the feeling of any woman I proposed to marry—how, above all, suspicions should be avoided, and everything else that would give pain. I think some plan should be sought.—I cannot say that I have yet hit upon one that seems feasible.’

‘I am afraid there is none that could effect all that, Lennox.’

The younger man remained silent, thinking.

But presently he spoke again.

‘If I were by-and-by to ask you, sir, to assist me to break off the engagement between myself and my cousin—a gentleman who has promised to marry a woman cannot easily retreat from his word. I am not asking this because I am not attached to my cousin; quite the contrary. But I cannot divest myself of an impression that I foresee complications—of a distressing

kind. I do not think that Eleanor would mind very much.'

The last sentence had been difficult to utter. But he had managed to say it.

Mr. Peyton sat down again, and looked at his son. A deep shadow of pain lay on the young man's face. Eleanor might be indifferent whether she married him or not—Mr. Peyton knew that she was so—but losing her would cost him dear.

At last Mr. Peyton began, speaking slowly,

'You compel me to admit, Lennox, that I was desirous to see this match made between you and your cousin, because I at one time regarded it as the only way by which I could save the estates from going altogether out of the family. That is no longer the case. But this is more than I could ask.'

'I think of the future—of what might

ensue—and of my sister—and of my mother's memory—and of you, too. I would not have it said, "Oh, it was natural enough for Mr. Peyton to leave everything to his second family. He always preferred them—and no wonder. His first wife was"—this or that.'

'I admit the cogency of what you say,' replied Mr. Peyton. 'But I cannot suggest sacrifices which I think greater than you should be asked to make. Only—if you resolve on this—if you come to me and say that you wish your engagement with your cousin broken off—I will lend you my assistance.'

Lennox rose.

'We will talk of it another time,' he said. 'I feel I want some time to think.'

He was gone, and Mr. Peyton said to himself,

'The bookish boy has stuff in him.'

That is a fine fellow. If I have a son of my own at all like that, I shall be more than satisfied with him.'

And Lennox, sitting amongst his books, thought of his mother, and his sister, and the fair-haired girl he loved, who was to be his wife—or not his wife—of the woman for whom he must suffer: women for whom men are always suffering: women who cost men so dear!



## CHAPTER IV.

IN the back drawing-room of Mrs. Torres's house in Hanover Terrace, Regent's Park, Rosamond Peyton sat by the fire, very much at her ease in a particularly comfortable chair. The house had been, during the summer, refurbished from basement to attics, and the smart room was all spick and span with its fashionable furniture, modern ornaments, and pretty upholstery, equally unlike her own home in Leicestershire, the strange house at Wold, and the bare rooms of Belmont: perhaps in some senses the pleasantest of all.

She was not alone. On the other side of the hearth, in another particularly comfortable chair, sat her hostess, occupied, as was also Rosamond, with some sort of pretence needlework. She stopped every minute or so to hold the stuff further from her eyes.

Mrs. Torres, in effect, wanted spectacles, and wanted them badly; but she would not yet adopt them, for the same reason that she wore under her widow's cap a very becoming front of nicely curled hair that made her look a good ten years' younger than she was. In person she was very stout, ponderously stout, so that she moved with fatigue, and had in consequence grown, not unnaturally, extremely idle. For the rest, a pleasant-faced, vastly good-humoured, and somewhat uninteresting body; wholly absorbed in her son, whom she idolised, and indulged to the

top of his bent, talkative, without being a babbler after the manner of the late Mrs. Peyton, and having an amiable weakness of never opening her mouth to anyone of her own sex without saying 'my dear'—which she really meant, being persuaded that the world was filled with most amiable people. 'If we cannot always see their good points, it is only because we don't properly understand them, my dear,' she would say to ladies who differed from her respecting the excellent qualities of the human race in general.

She made, however, one exception, Mrs. Chevalier of Wold.

'They tell me you have seen her,' she said to Rosamond. 'A very dreadful person, my dear.'

'She was very kind to me, Mrs. Torres.'

'I am sure I am glad to hear it, my dear: though I don't at all understand it.'

I knew her years before you were born. A most horrible woman.'

The contrast between herself and the poor lone woman at Wold impressed Rosamond vividly. Mrs. Chevalier was the very ideal of a woman whose life had contained some grim tragedy. Any connection between Mrs. Torres and tragedy of the mildest sort was inconceivable. Nevertheless, this stout, good-humoured dame, so much in need of some kind of spectacles, was the widow of a man who had been the victim of a crime so hideous that, even now, nearly five-and-twenty years afterwards, the murder was not altogether forgotten. She had been so broken-hearted that fears had been entertained of her life. When she recovered she had been still a young and handsome woman, but no idea had ever entered her thoughts of anything but constancy to the dead.

And she had lived ever since with all her love concentrated upon the one son who was all of the once idolised husband that she had left her. And thus she had become the rather dull, placid, vastly good-natured, and perhaps slightly weak body she was.

The ladies were alone, for Marmaduke Torres had gone with a friend to the theatre. They had tea on a little gipsy-table between them, over which Rosamond, at her hostess's request, presided, refilling the cups when necessary, and selecting lumps of sugar with almost mathematical accuracy, so that Mrs. Torres's tea should be exactly of the sweetness required.

She liked her future mother-in-law, and found her companionship enjoyable. It was of a tranquil kind, whereof she had little experience. The stillness of Wold was that of an artificial haven, around

which the storms of life still seethed beneath a hurricane: that of the house in Hanover Terrace was the calm of a sleeping sea, whose waves had ceased to heave. The former was doubtless more engaging to the imagination: the latter the more refreshing—and certainly better for a young lady of Rosamond Peyton's excitable temperament. For all that, Mrs. Torres was not taking any particular place in Rosamond's heart. 'A dear, good, kind creature,' Rosamond called her, but did not feel constrained to love her, as she had felt in the case of Mrs. Chevalier.

Still she had been very happy in London. First of all, of course, she had Marmaduke, who was becomingly attentive. And a great deal of kindness was shown her. And there was no Eleanor at hand to poison her pleasures. As she was in crape she could not go to public entertainments,

but Mrs. Torres provided her with amusements of other kinds, and took her to all sorts of places whither she could go.

One of those was Major Torres's studio, where she saw the celebrated picture asserted to be so perfect a portrait of herself.

Her first observation upon it was to point to the group of men talking in the background.

‘Those men have been ill-treating that girl.’

‘You think so,’ remarked the Major, who was both watching to hear what she would say, and meanwhile comparing herself with the picture.

‘One can see it. A girl is not jealous like that about nothing.’

‘I put the figures in only because something was wanted there.’

‘Do you think it like yourself, my dear?’ asked Mrs. Torres.

‘I wish I was as handsome,’ answered Rosamond.

That was exactly what the Major was thinking, that his picture a good deal surpassed his original.

‘It appears to me almost incredible, Marmaduke,’ observed Mrs. Torres, as they left the Major’s, ‘that Major Torres should have produced so striking a likeness of Rosamond from having had but a glimpse or two of her. She must have made a great impression upon him. But he did not seem to me much interested in her this morning.’

‘When these artist fellows are really seized with an idea, it is wonderful what effects they can produce.’

‘Ah, I suppose that explains it,’ agreed Mrs. Torres, always ready to be guided by her son’s sagacity.



‘ You see,’ continued Marmaduke, ‘ he somehow hit upon her character. That is wonderfully like her when she is angry.’

‘ Then, my dear boy, please be careful never to make her angry,’ replied the good dame on the spot. ‘ Though I don’t know why you should. She is a nice girl : and I like a young woman who does not think herself as handsome as she is. It is a trait that grows rarer now-a-days.’

Besides Major Torres’s studio, Rosamond went also to a good many other places, met a good many of her lover’s friends and acquaintance, and had the pleasure of finding herself appreciated as a good-looking girl who did not give herself airs. Nobody seemed at all distressed by her lack of accomplishments. Nor was she at all worse educated than other girls : on the contrary, she found to her surprise that the mere

accident of her having been a listener to her father's and brother's and cousin's conversation had made her acquainted with a good many things everyone did not know—say, for example, Mrs. Torres, who would remark,

‘That is a very pretty way of yours, my dear, to make no pretence of being a clever girl; though you know no end of things of which most of us have never heard. Try to stay like that, my dear.’

And the men admired her driving. Having had an arm broken in the enterprise of reducing a refractory mare to docility was a kind of distinction.

So agreeable was her visit to Hanover Terrace that Rosamond said to herself,

‘After all, I am going to be appreciated like other girls, at last. It is a comfort to have done with being ill-used.’

In effect she was happy, whether when

being shown about London, or whilst spending a quiet hour as at present by the fireside with her hostess.

Whilst they sipped their tea, and trifled with their fancy work, the two ladies chatted, or, more strictly speaking, Mrs. Torres chatted, and Rosamond provided the little remarks necessary to keep the conversation alive. Mrs. Torres had two subjects of conversation. One was the much lamented Mr. Torres. The good dame's reminiscences of this gentleman were liable to bore Rosamond a little, unless perchance Mrs. Torres made allusion to some detail of the tragedy at Wold—which she did not infrequently. That subject had an inexhaustible interest for Rosamond. The other subject was Marmaduke—in his fond mother's estimation a paragon. Rosamond, being much in love, was disposed to agree with Mrs.

Torres there, and found this topic always most interesting.

Sometimes it seemed to her that all the difference between Mrs. Torres and Mrs. Chevalier was, that the one woman still had her son, and the other had lost hers. Perhaps Rosamond was nearer a great truth than she supposed.

Mrs. Torres had just broached a new subject, that of a journal which her husband had kept during a tour which he and she had taken together, before Marmaduke was born.

‘I have been talking to Marmaduke about it, my dear,’ she was saying. ‘You see, Mr. Torres wrote it in a common diary:’—here the good lady paused to hold her work at arm’s length, and to take a long look at the proper place for the next stitch:—‘in a common diary that was never well bound. As it is one of the

very few pieces of my dear husband's writing that I have left, and a story, my dear, of very, very happy days, I have read it and read it, until it is falling to pieces. Marmaduke, who is always thinking of all sorts of clever things, tells me I had better have it re-bound. And whilst I am having it re-bound he suggests something else. You know he is always ready with happy suggestions.'

'Yes, he has always plenty of good ideas, has he not?' chimed in Rosamond.

A servant entering with a letter interrupted the conversation.

'From your brother, my dear,' said Mrs. Torres, after having regarded the envelope from a good distance, 'to say that he can get leave to spend a day or two with us, I hope. Open it, and read it to me, my dear, if you will be so kind.'

Rosamond opened the letter, which was

a reply from Lennox to an invitation sent him from Mrs. Torres to spend a day or two with her and his sister. He could not come to stay, but he could run up from Oxford, on the day after to-morrow, for the day.

‘I am sorry he cannot stay with us, my dear. But you shall write at once and tell him that I shall be delighted to see him, if it be only for a few hours.’

‘It is always impossible to tear Lennox away from his books,’ explained Rosamond.

‘And quite right, my dear. Your brother is a very clever man. Marmaduke has often told me that he is the cleverest man he knows. When Marmaduke was reading for his matriculation, I could hardly get him to take the exercise necessary for his health. And of course your brother’s examination is ever so much more difficult.

Write at once, my dear, and tell him that I shall be very glad to see him the day after to-morrow, and I'll have the letter posted on the spot.'

The letter was written and despatched, and Rosamond returned to her needlework. Mrs. Torres also to the subject of the journal.

'This is a most delightful idea of Marmaduke's, my dear. He suggests that when I have the journal bound I should have a good number of photographs of the places which we visited bound up with it.'

'That is a capital idea of Marmaduke's.'

'Is it not, my dear. I shall go and get the photographs to-morrow.'

They began discussing which shops should be patronised, and were still engaged with that topic when Marmaduke Torres returned from the theatre.

‘ You must tell us all about the play, Marmaduke,’ said his mother.

‘ Yes, please, we want to know all about it,’ echoed Rosamond.

To please them he made an attempt to narrate the story of the play, and to describe its most dramatic scenes. To do that in such a manner as to make the whole comprehensible to a listener demands of the narrator a good deal of knack and of descriptive power: also is never to be successfully accomplished by a person who plunges recklessly into the first scene of the play.

Very soon Marmaduke, who found himself engaged in a not very congenial task, was floundering about amidst a number of sentences beginning with,—‘ I ought to have told you.’—‘ You see, in order to understand this, there is something else that requires to be explained.’—‘ I forgot



to say : '—and so forth, until he had at last come to a deep stop with,

‘ I am afraid that I am not making it very clear.’

‘ Well, not *very*,’ agreed Rosamond.

Upon which they all laughed.

‘ The truth is that it seemed rather mixed, and I did not understand it all,’ explained Marmaduke.

Relinquishing his abortive attempt to tell the story of the play, he began instead to dilate upon a subject which he found to be of a much more manageable nature, the personal beauty and histrionic ability of the leading lady, a young actress, so he averred, quite a *débutante*, but already considered a dangerous rival by all sorts of celebrities.

This fascinating young lady, Violet Knaresborough by name, he described as a blonde, with the divinest of blue eyes,

a faultless figure, the most beautiful arms and hands, and every single feature absolute perfection. Whilst he ran on about her, commenting upon what this man and that man had previously told him concerning the lady's charms, and describing how he had found the reality exceed his anticipations, his mother continued her work, smiling a gentle amusement.

But Rosamond's hands lay already idle in her lap, as she listened attentively with her dark eyes bent on the floor.

'Dear me,' she said, looking round presently, as her *fiancé's* eulogies of the newly-discovered actress grew warmer, 'I think I shall be feeling quite jealous presently.'

'Probably the woman is forty, and very likely has grandchildren,' dropped Mrs. Torres.

'On the contrary, she is scarcely five-

and-twenty,' replied Marmaduke, taking up the actress's cause with zeal.

He did not notice Rosamond's eyes furtively watching him.

Howbeit Mrs. Torres began to speak first of Lennox Peyton's letter, and then of her own determination to purchase on the morrow the photographs which were to illustrate the late Mr. Torres's journal: and so Rosamond that evening heard no more of Miss Knaresborough.

## CHAPTER V.

THE next morning they set out together in quest of the photographs.

Mrs. Torres was compelled herself to make the collection, as no one else could recognise the views that reawakened her recollections of the tour; and the process of choosing promised to be almost interminable until the shopman, perceiving what was the matter, persuaded the good dame to believe that the lights and shades of the photographs were improved by inspecting them through a pair of lenses with which he provided her. After that,

she got on better, but was still a long time making her purchases.

Meanwhile, Marmaduke and Rosamond wandered about the shop, as the latter wished to buy a small present for Eleanor. Whilst they were looking at this and that, Marmaduke suddenly exclaimed,

‘Oh, look! That is Violet Knaresborough!’

Rosamond looked, and found herself confronted with a photograph of an undeniably pretty girl—who certainly had nothing of the appearance of a grandmother—taken under those advantageous circumstances which actresses know how to command.

‘I should like to have that,’ said Marmaduke.

He called one of the attendants to him.

‘We have several other portraits of the lady: some taken only last week, sir,’ said

the man. 'Perhaps you would like to see them.'

The photographs were produced. They sat down to turn them over, and Marmaduke began appealing to Rosamond to admire them. Presently one appeared in which the lady was represented in a costume that he had seen her wearing the previous evening.

'Ah, I must have that one,' he exclaimed, immediately securing it. 'That is herself to the life. An awfully neat little figure, is it not?'

And next he appealed to Rosamond to tell him which of two other photographs was the prettier.

'I am afraid I am not much of a judge,' replied Rosamond. 'You had better take the one which you admire most. You forget that I have not seen your actress.'

He was too intent upon his purchases to

catch the peculiar intonation of the last two words.

Rising from her chair, Rosamond made some excuse for rejoining Mrs. Torres.

By the time that lady's purchases were concluded, Marmaduke also had a tolerable sized parcel of his own of mounted and framed photographs of Miss Violet Knaresborough.

All the goods reached the house before dinner, and, having secured his share, he spent an hour in hanging his purchases in his own snugger.

As Rosamond passed the door, when descending the stairs dressed for dinner, looking in her black—a colour which always became her—very much handsomer than Miss Violet Knaresborough in the most flattering of her photographs, he also invited her to come and admire his new pictures.

On the right, over the fireplace, in a tall white reed frame, hung Miss Violet Knaresborough, smiling seduction over an opened fan, beauty in triumph; and on the left, over the fireplace, hung Miss Violet Knaresborough, with her head bent, hiding her face between her shapely little hands, beauty in distress. Miss Violet Knaresborough, in the gown which he had seen her wearing the previous evening, stood in the centre of the mantelshelf, and on one side of his little writing-table was Miss Violet Knaresborough in a *négligée* costume, to match a photograph that Rosamond had given him of herself which stood on the other side of the table.

That was the last straw.

‘I hope at least,’ remarked Rosamond, with asperity, ‘that, if you are going to keep that woman’s photograph there, you will put mine away in a drawer.’



It is always incomprehensible to a man why anyone should regard seriously the portraits of some pretty woman which he hangs up in his room for a few weeks, afterwards to relegate them to the same limbo as their predecessors; and Marmaduke Torres regarded her with surprise. Her dark eyes were flashing on him as if they had power to stab.

‘You don’t like my putting it there?’ he asked, with a puzzled air.

‘I? Oh, I don’t mind.’

‘Let me see, then. Where shall I put it?’

He had immediately taken the photograph from the writing-table.

‘I should say in the fire.’

She had dropped into a chair, with her back to him; and was impatiently tapping the ground with her foot.

‘Burn it? Really? But I will burn it

at once, dearest, if you wish it. Shall I?’

He came to her, gently laying his hand on her shoulder.

‘Don’t touch me!’

She started aside from his touch as if it stung her, and, instantly rising, passed up the room as she said,

‘I do not want you to burn the thing. I should get introduced to *Miss Violet Knaresborough*, if I were you. You admire her so much.’

Left alone, Marmaduke Torres whistled to himself softly.

In the evening he found it difficult to get a private word with her. But at last he managed it.

‘I have taken down those photos.’

‘Indeed!’

‘All of them.’

‘Indeed! Has that anything to do with me?’

He possessed discretion enough not to assert that it had. Later, when she was going upstairs, he managed to waylay her.

‘Look,’ he said, pointing to the hearth where there was a heap of charred paper. ‘I have burnt those photos. Come in and see.’

‘That was rather a waste of money, was it not?’

‘Won’t you come in and see?’

‘No, thank you.’

She was already passing up the stairs.

‘Won’t you say good-night, dear?’

‘Good-night,’ she replied, in a short, hard tone, as she disappeared.

It reminded him of the manner in which long ago she had said ‘Good-night’ to him in the dark near the river.

But the next morning at breakfast she met him with a smile, and let him kiss her as usual.

The reconciliation was so complete that she even said, in the course of the morning,

‘ I was cross with you yesterday. Only, it was all your fault.’

‘ My fault? I suppose it was a little. Only I did not know, you see.’

‘ Next time you don’t know, think of your cousin’s celebrated picture. I am not so good-looking, but I am quite—all the rest of it.’

‘ You are a great deal better-looking,’ he replied, promptly.

Well, he believed it: and Rosamond had no objection to hearing the statement made.

So they were quite happy again before Lennox arrived.

After luncheon, Mrs. Torres managed that Lennox and his sister should be alone together for a while.

‘I am going to leave you to have a little *tête-à-tête* with your brother,’ she said. ‘I am sure you must have things to say to each other.’

It did not appear that they had very much to say. Having learned that Rosamond was happy,—‘perfectly happy,’ she said—Lennox had less than usual to talk about. But he inquired what news she had from home.

‘Not much. Eleanor writes, of course, sometimes.’

He did not inquire what Eleanor wrote.

‘But I suppose you hear from her oftener than I?’ said Rosamond.

‘I have not heard very lately.’

He seemed to Rosamond out of spirits.

‘You are not looking quite the thing, Lennox. You are not reading too hard, I hope?’

‘You may be quite easy about that. The more I read the better I feel.’

He might have added, with truth, ‘Because I think less of the things that distress me.’ But he added nothing of the kind.

As they continued talking—Rosamond as usual had a good deal more to say than he—he began turning over idly a volume of engravings of Italian churches that lay on a table by his side.

‘What beautiful churches these Catholic churches are,’ he said, presently. ‘I have been going sometimes lately to the Catholic church at Oxford. The services interest me.’

‘You are not going over to Rome, I hope, Lennox?’

‘Would it shock you very much if I did?’ he asked, certainly not in a tone that indicated his doing as he said.

‘It would be very wrong, would it not?’

‘Why? All the English people were Roman Catholics once.’

‘They knew no better,’ remarked Rosamond.

Lennox closed the volume, and changed the subject of conversation, which appeared to contain no particular interest for either of them, to speak of the date of the end of the term.

‘I suppose father will be still at Belmont,’ he said, ‘and that I shall come down there.’

Then Marmaduke Torres joined them.

After dinner, Lennox and he drove to Paddington together.

‘I must come and see you off, old chap,’ Torres had said.

‘Marmaduke is very fond of your brother, my dear,’ said Mrs. Torres, as she and Rosamond sat by the fire. ‘I can

remember his talking about him ever since your brother first joined him at school.—And I like your brother too. He is a very clever young man, and very fond of you, my dear. And that is all that it should be. Only, I don't think he looks strong.' Mrs. Torres held her work at arm's length for a minute, and then continued, 'Don't you think that perhaps he studies too much, my dear?'

'He says that the more he studies the better he feels,' replied Rosamond.

But she knew as little of the reason as Mrs. Torres herself.

In the hansom, bowling along towards Paddington, Marmaduke Torres was having a confidential talk with Lennox on the subject of Miss Violet Knaresborough's photographs.

'You must not do that sort of thing,



Torres. You don't know what she is capable of.'

'Oh, yes, I do. I have not forgotten the adventure on the river. Only, at the moment, I was not thinking.'

'You must think—you must be on your guard with her always—if you have any real affection for her,' said Lennox.

He was thinking, for he was sure that no one knew his sister as he himself knew her, 'Would it have been better, after all, if she and Torres had not met—if she had kept house for me?'

But the girl would probably have loved some one else, if not Marmaduke Torres.

## CHAPTER VI.

STROLLING in the lonely gardens at Wold, which Rosamond Peyton had explored with so eager a curiosity, that genial fatalist, Octavius Jaffray, slowly smoked his pipe, whilst cheerfully occupied in wasting his precious time.

‘Personally,’ he was reflecting, ‘there is nothing I hate so much as waste of time. At present, however, the course of things, equally inconsiderate of my tastes and of everyone’s else—and, indeed, I may add, incapable of consideration, *ça va sans dire*—has worked my destiny into a necessity

of my wasting some time. I bow to the ignorance of fate with a smile, and avail myself of one more opportunity of learning to enjoy a destiny which I am unable to alter.'

It was the hour of an early December sunset; a grey close of a colourless day. A few rifts in the western clouds, palely coloured with cold fires, threw chilly lights on the landscape. Only the vanishing sunshine, such as it was, played round the old house more freely than in the summer, reaching it through the many leafless boughs of the trees.

At the further end of the garden, Octavius Jaffray paused in his walk to take a look at the old house.

An exceedingly light vapour, like a film of silver, hung in the air, softening the contours of every object without in the least interfering with their being seen. In

it the façade of the house rose beautiful in its bold outlines and steely colouring. One or two of the oriel windows caught the light, not red nor brilliant, but sparkling like the scales of a fish, amidst the stone framing of a pearl grey, that became one shade darker upon the slates of the roof, one shade lighter where the walls directly met the evening glow, and of a dull blackness where the windows were turned away from it. On a red-brick wall near him that same pearly light gave the rosy tones of the bricks a lilac of extremest delicacy. Straying patches of brightness that had an appearance of having been forgotten in the retreat of the day, and so left behind, rested here and there on the leaves of the shrubs, lay scattered on the lawn, and fell asleep on the broad steps of the portal. Farther off, amidst the encircling ring of trees, with black, damp trunks, and inky

lacework of entangled twigs, the greys took a more sombre almost funereal character. Against them, and against the clouded sky, the old house stood out in its pallid illumination almost like some ghostly mansion of a dream.

There are moments when each thing assumes a beauty appropriate to it, and, regarding the old house, the old man reflected,

‘That is more than beautiful—weird—one might almost believe the place had a soul.’

He stood long scanning the spectacle it presented.

The heart must be a cold one that can regard with indifference any human dwelling that has been long inhabited. Every such place has been the scene of so much gladness and of so much sadness. There so many little eyes have for the first time

opened upon the strange light of life. There so many, some perhaps the same, have closed for the last long sleep, some with relief, and some with regret, some with indifference, and some in agonies. There so many have played their motley part in the long, shifting, passionate drama of man's existence, stranger by far, though it may less touch the imagination, than either the beginning or the end. How many hopes have entered the door, how many fears! How often laughter has waked the echoes of the rooms; and how often tears! Coming—and going, with their loves and their hatreds, how many feet have trodden the stairs! How many hearts have beaten high at the sight of the old fire-side, and how many memories, from distant spots of earth, have sent their wild longings back to it. And the games that the children played, and the kisses of

lips that met, and the touch of parted hands, and the silence of hearts too full for words—all that was and is not, has it left nothing behind it under the old roof-tree? Ah, something surely!

‘Ce que les hommes font laisse une empreinte aux murs.’

But when the old house has been the scene of a crime, or of a mystery, when everyone knows that something more than the daily drama of human life has been enacted within its walls! Then the thoughts which the old place awakens come fast and thick, with tenfold meaning and intensity, and the spell of its past is felt by the stoniest heart, as a thing that can never be parted from it, an influence of the house itself, that will be felt in the lives of everyone who shall inhabit it as long as its walls may stand.

That was the thought with which Octa-

vius Jaffray strolled on again, when the lights changed, for the perfection of the illusion lasted a few minutes only.

‘It would have been difficult to get a tenant for that house if Mrs. Chevalier had not taken it. And, when the old lady dies, to get a tenant might prove as difficult as before she came here. People do not like houses with histories—of a kind. It never occurs to them to think that what must happen must happen. The world contains few philosophers. And, so far from drawing a curtain over the drama connected with the house, Mrs. Chevalier’s residence there has rather intensified it. How much longer, I wonder, will she be its tenant?’

The last thought, one that had come into his head a good many times during the last three days—which he had spent at Wold—was connected with the unusual



circumstances of his visit. Mrs. Chevalier had sent for him. She had done that before : and whensoever she summoned him he came. But this time when he arrived she was unable to see him.

A change had taken place in her health. That unbroken vigour, which from her earliest childhood until a few days before had never known a break, which, through good fortune and evil, alike in sorrow and joy, had furnished her with strength and courage beyond the measure of her sex, had at last failed her. She awakened one morning languid and feeble, instead of refreshed, and could not eat her breakfast. The medical man, who, save on the occasion of Rosamond's accident, had seldom entered the gates of Wold, except to pay Mrs. Chevalier a kind of complimentary visit—during which he invariably assured her that so long as she continued the

regular *régime*, which had hitherto kept her in perfect health, she would have no need of his services—was summoned to her bedside, and found her low, feverish, and generally out of sorts. He insisted upon her remaining in her room, and was a little disconcerted to find her grow rather worse than better during the next forty-eight hours. It was at his instance that Octavius Jaffray, to whom the housekeeper had immediately written, in obedience to orders, remained in the house.

‘I do not want Mrs. Chevalier to see anyone, if it can be avoided,’ the doctor said. ‘But it is a satisfaction for her to know that you are here, and I trust you will stay.’

Accordingly, Octavius Jaffray, who was particularly desirous of being in another part of the country to watch the excavation of a recently discovered ‘bone

cave,' accepted a few days' enforced idleness as a decree of destiny; lighted his pipe, and remained at Wold, accepting his enforced detention with all the resignation of a fatalist, and amusing himself with rising superior to the stupidities of the inevitable.

He was a kind of prisoner. He never went in and out of the gates of Wold except either to arrive or to leave, whilst his stay in the house was so arranged, that by no means all the servants were aware of the presence of a visitor. It was no doubt owing to such circumstances, and to the handsomely paid silence of the domestics at Wold—a breach of which would have been met with merciless instant dismissal—that the gossiping of the villagers, and of the domestics at Belmont, had not promulgated the fact that one of the friends of the family at the latter

house was an old gentleman—whose name was one of the Wold secrets—who had for many years occasionally seen Mrs. Chevalier.

Perhaps that secret, like all the others, would not have to be kept much longer. Smoking his pipe, and exercising himself in not being disturbed about things that must happen, Mr. Jaffray feared that such might be the case. When, after many years, health that has never failed at last gives way, the end is seldom far off.

Coming back to the house as night began to fall he met the doctor leaving.

‘Any better report this evening, doctor?’

‘Much better, we shall pull through this time. She is asking to see you—and you may see her.’

‘This will be nothing, after all?’

The man of medicine pressed his lips together, and shook his head.

‘Not nothing. But less than I feared. I do not mind telling you that yesterday I was alarmed. But go now and see Mrs. Chevalier. You will find her up. I am afraid you will notice a change.’

There was no change in the black-panelled sitting-room with its long stone-mullioned windows ; no change in the disposition of the furniture, the Chinese screen, and central table, and the tall-backed chairs ; no change in the stilly sombre air of the apartment, no change in its quiet melancholy repose. And its occupant sat in her old arm-chair in its old place, with her small table, and her china tea-service, and her silver bell by her side.

But a change in herself—a great change.

The wasted colourless face, always so pale, so inexpressibly sad, so infinitely weary, had been touched by something that left it, what it was never before, feeble. The same icy secrecy rested on the narrow lips, but their strength was gone; and the fire of life in her dark sunken eyes was dim.

She did not rise to meet him, only gave him her thin hand, with that same shadow of a smile, but still sadder than of old, as she said.

‘I have been ill, Octavius. Thank you for staying here.’

He poured out the tea for her.

‘I feel equal to doing nothing for myself,’ she said. ‘But I am much better to-day. It is a strange thing to be ill, is it not?’

‘Tell me, first of all, all about yourself,’ he asked.

‘There is not much to tell. I have been

ill. I am an old woman, Octavius. And—of course—this is the end. I feel it coming. Oh, not to-day nor to-morrow. Not this time. But—perhaps next time. If I send, come at once. That was one of the things I wanted to say. And stay—to the end.—But I think I shall see the spring.—There is still a little time for me to learn to be resigned and to forgive.'

She paused for a minute or more, and resumed.

'I am going to tell you some things, Octavius, because I may not be able to tell you them when you come again ; if I were worse than I was this time. I think often of the children. It was a great happiness for me to have seen them—one for which I never hoped. I picture them to myself when I am alone. And I feel that since I have seen them there is nothing more left—if I may be spared until I have learned

to forgive. I should like to thank you, Octavius,'—she put out her thin hand and laid it on his,—‘to thank you—my old boy friend—do you remember?’

The sad face so worn melted into one of its poor shadows of a smile.

‘I remember, I remember,’ said the old man quickly, speaking with the haste of a man who can scarcely trust his voice. ‘Of course I remember. But you must not thank me. Those were our destinies. Ah.—That was long ago, was it not?’

‘Long, long ago!’

Their hands rested together, and a silence fell in the sombre room, whilst their thoughts harked backwards to that ‘long, long ago!’

She was five-and-twenty then. He was fourteen. She was betrothed, and to be married in a few weeks. But that made no difference to the love of the boy; that



love of a boy which expects nothing, asks nothing, comes to nothing, but is like nothing else in the world; a worship that, while it lasts, has no limits, and a memory that never fails. The boy grows into a man, and smiles at his infatuations. The man grows hard in the battle of life, and parts with all his illusions. It is years ago that he understood that *she* was just the same as all the rest. Only to the end he carries with him a recollection of *her*—not what experience tells him she was—not what after all the years she is—but what he thought her ‘long, long ago.’

What was it these two old folks saw? Only he saw it so much more vividly than she, because he was the boy. A path through a field that came to a brook, and a hedge with a green willow-tree and a stile; a handsome young fellow helping a beautiful dark girl over the shallow

brook, and a boy who stood in attendance like a page, too humble in his boy-love of the girl even to envy her lover. And some one who chaffed him, and said,

‘You must not expect to wait on Miss Littleton when Mr. Chevalier is by, you know, Jaffray.’

To which the boy answered,

‘Of course I don’t. But I can still be Miss Littleton’s friend.’

And the handsome girl lay her little hand on his shoulder, making him proud as he felt the light touch, and said,

‘That is right, Octavius. You shall be my boy-friend.’

It was the same hand that lay on his now, so old, and cold, and wasted, so light, though not light as the young girl’s was. But he saw, not the worn, pale woman, weary and heavy laden, but the young

girl with her beautiful face, and the light of the pride of her life in her eyes.

And as he saw her, and remembered that he had been her friend all along through the years, he was glad.

She had taken away her hand.

‘As we grow old our thoughts go back more and more to our childhood, do they not, Octavius?’

‘They do.’

And again they were silent.

The old woman resumed,

‘All my affairs are in perfect order. You saw my will years ago. I have not made another. You know my wishes. I know that I have no need to say more than that they remain unchanged.’

‘No need to say any more. I will see them executed.’

‘Then I want to hear what you have to tell me about the children.’

‘I saw Rosamond in town, while she was staying with her *fiancé*. She is with some other friends now.’

‘Tell me what you think of the match. What does Mrs. Torres say, she was always a weak creature.’

The antipathy between those two ladies was evidently reciprocal.

‘She is pleased. You know her indulgence of her son is unbounded. Were he to bring her home a maid-of-all-work and express his desire to marry her, she would find reasons for admiring his choice.’

‘I don’t think we need trouble ourselves much about her. The son—he is more important. I cannot conceal from myself that it is a strange match.’

‘It is.’

‘And the girl—well, you and I know, Octavius.’

‘Yes. Only things that must be, must be.’

Heredity is—heredity, destiny. It must be.'

'Only, will he understand her? Or—  
if he should not?'

'The odd thing is that he seems to understand her. Well, of course, she may have told him things. It would not be unnatural. I do not know. He has penetrated some of her secrets somehow. I assure you that it is so.' The old woman was looking a little incredulous. 'One could almost believe that he had some inkling of a mystery connected with her.'

'That is impossible,' said Mrs. Chevalier, with decision.

'I did not mean *that*.'

'And the boy?'

'I have seen him, too, at Oxford. He is reading hard. They say a certain first.'

That was not all that he had gathered on the occasion of his visit to Lennox at

Oxford. But he let the rest pass. It was but a suspicion, though a shrewd one.

‘He is a fine fellow,’ said Mrs. Chevalier.

‘But I have some other news for you—about Mr. Peyton. You remember my telling you that he said his wife’s death would make great changes?’

‘I remember. Changes unfavourable to the children.’

‘Well—yes.’

‘It cannot be helped, Octavius. I have done what I could. But tell me.’

‘He has doubts about those children. Only, his doubts were about his wife. The boy defended his mother.’

‘His mother?’

For an instant Mrs. Chevalier regarded her visitor with surprise ; but immediately added,

‘I understand. I like that lad. But the woman was a fool. Go on.’

‘Peyton will marry again. There is no doubt about that. I should say he would marry as soon as he can. And I fancy that it is his intention to leave the family property to the children of his second wife—if he have any. You can see the direction in which his thoughts are working.’

The old woman thought for a minute or two.

‘I see,’ she said. ‘Do you know—I hope that Mr. Peyton may have children. It is only just to hope so. I have always been sorry for Mr. Peyton. If he leaves the family property to his children by the second wife, that will not matter. He cannot do so, though, without his eldest son’s consent.’

‘He will have that consent: if he has it not already. The lad gives it on

condition of his mother's memory being respected.'

'I like that lad, Octavius,' said the old woman, with emphasis.

'And I think I can tell you whom Mr. Peyton will marry.'

'Indeed! Whom?'

'A certain Mrs. Dromere, who lives near here. She is a cousin of the Torres. She was a Miss Torres. She is a woman, say, of thirty-one or two, and has been a widow some years. Means to marry this time for money. A practical sort of woman, far from bad-looking. I notice that she and Peyton seem to understand each other a good deal.'

'A step-mother,' remarked Mrs. Chevalier, after a moment's thought.

'You see, in less than a year the girl will be married, and the boy takes his degree in June.'



‘True.—I hope the young widow may make Mr. Peyton a good wife. He has had one bad one—poor man.’

After that she detained Octavius Jaffray to ask him whether he would leave that evening, or on the morrow, and, upon his replying that he would like to be assured that she was better before quitting her, replied,

‘Stay till to-morrow, then. I shall be glad if you will. You know I can never thank you.’

In the evening, sitting alone by the drawing-room fire, Octavius Jaffray asked himself,

‘How long will it be before I am summoned again? I see a great change.—Well, destiny will determine. The inherited forces of life, and the results of the environment, will play out their

changes, and then, when they have finished—rest. How she must need rest! Who would have thought that it would be my lot to watch over the last days of handsome Annie Littleton !'

Ah, yes. For him she was still Annie Littleton, who laid her light hand on his shoulder by the brook.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Octavius Jaffray informed Mrs. Chevalier that he believed that he could say whom Mr. Peyton would choose for his second wife, he was not the only person able to make a shrewd guess at the lady destined to succeed to the empire of the widower's heart—or home. Perhaps, considering Mr. Peyton's age, the latter expression is the more appropriate. A man of five-and-fifty, unless prematurely old, is about as little susceptible to the tender passion as any human being can be.

A good many people in the neighbourhood of Belmont believed that they could guess upon whom Mr. Peyton's choice would fall. Some of them were even unkind enough to hint that his eyes had been turned in a certain direction before the first Mrs. Peyton's death. The promptitude with which he had evinced an inclination for a second marriage was a topic of universal comment. But whispers were afloat of reasons that prompted his actions. 'Something to do with his son, my dear: that ascetic-looking young man.'

Meanwhile, one person had passed beyond the stage of conjecture, and arrived at that of positive certainty. That person was Florence Dromere.

Just at present Florence Dromere was of opinion that nothing short of an inspiration received from her good angel had brought her to reside at that dilapi-

dated ruin with a ridiculous name which she at present inhabited. And it is certain that she had been brought thither by some of the tenderest and deepest feelings of which a woman's heart is capable.

However that might be, she was at present seeing a good deal of Eleanor, and often with her at Belmont. Well; was it not common kindness to pay Eleanor rather more frequent visits at a time when she must be lonely, not having her cousin with her? 'Thank goodness that other terrible girl is out of the way,' was Florence's private sentiment respecting Rosamond's absence. Eleanor also had been so much attached to her aunt, and must feel her death deeply. So it was mere common charity to try to cheer her. Besides, Belmont had become by this time Eleanor's personal property, and she was spending a little money on

the house, and liked to talk over questions of taste with her friend. Anyhow, Florence was often at Belmont.

Often, too, Florence sat musing for hours together by the fireside in her tumble-down Wee Nestie, reflecting, amidst other thoughts, that she was very glad that she had not given way to any foolish weaknesses respecting the man in town who had gone abroad.

‘This is so much better,’ said Florence to herself.

Often, too, she kissed the portrait that was kept in her small bureau, and talked to it.

‘You will not mind, George, will you? I am not going to love him, George. I am never going to love any man but you. Only I am so poor, George. It is not your fault, darling. If you had lived, your talents would have made us both rich,

would they not? Or, if only you were here, I would not mind being poor with you, dearest. You will understand, dear, will you not?’

Indeed, so sure was Florence, that she wrote to Major Torres to come and see her.

‘It is really good of you to come, Bob,’ she said, giving him the warmest of welcomes when he arrived. ‘I am going to give you a *recherche* dinner—a succession of *recherche* dinners if you would like to stay with me a day or two. Or, if you are in a hurry to return to town, you shall go back to-morrow.’

‘I must return to-morrow. I am very busy.’

‘Then that makes it all the kinder of you to come, Bob.’

She was looking very bright and happy, gayer he thought than when he had seen

her in the summer. He mentioned the fact, remarking,

‘ You are looking quite sparkling, Florence.’

‘ Am I? That is all right then,’ she answered, with pleasure.

When they were comfortably settled by the fire, she began,

‘ Bob, I think I am likely very soon to be better off.’

‘ Indeed !’

For a moment he regarded her with a look of perplexity, wondering at the amused smile in her face. Then, suddenly remembering his favourite theories, he asked,

‘ You are going to marry again ?’

‘ I think so, Bob. Only, before making sure, I want your advice.’

‘ The man has money ?’

‘ Yes. And sense.’



‘ I don’t want to make uncomplimentary remarks, Florence——’

‘ Only, you mean that if he has sense he could not waste his money on marrying a widow,’ concluded Florence for him, with a little laugh.

She was in excellent spirits.

‘ I may confess that something of that sort did cross my mind.’

‘ All men are not so parsimonious as you, Bob. Besides, there are circumstances under which a wife is worth more than she costs, even if she costs a good deal.’

‘ Certainly. When she brings a man more than she costs.’

‘ You are incorrigible, Bob. But—you will pay the penalty some day.’

‘ We need not discuss that. Tell me about this man.’

‘ Well, he has money. And he does your humble servant the honour of admir-

ing me—in a way I am able to appreciate. You know, Bob, that I have always said that I would marry again if a man presented himself who would offer me a comfortable establishment, and not ask in return more than I could give him.'

'Behold, the marriage contract as understood by the female sex,' observed the Major. 'Give me all I want, and don't ask me for more than I feel disposed to offer. Who is the imprudent man, Florence—for, on my soul, he is imprudent.'

'You are very rude, Bob. But I'll have my revenge some day—when your turn comes. It comes to all you men some day, Bob. The man is Mr. Peyton.'

Major Torres regarded her in silent surprise of a very effective kind.

'Better than you expected, is it not, Bob?'

'You have taken my breath away.'

‘I’ll come across to you and box your ears in a minute, Bob.’

‘Now look here, Florence, don’t be ridiculous. I have come down here because you asked me——’

‘Quite right, Bob, and I am very much obliged to you : and we will talk reasonably.’

‘Has Peyton proposed?’

‘No. He has not proposed. But that is only because I would not let him. He has tried twice, and he will try again. The question is, Bob, shall I accept him?’

‘There can hardly be a question about that, I should say. It is a splendid match. The only thing that strikes me is, that his wife has not been dead very long. It might have looked better, perhaps, if he had waited a little.’

‘That is the only thing that strikes you?’

‘ There are the children, of course. Your family—if you had any—would occupy a secondary position.’

‘ I am not so sure of that. Only, that is not the question. Do you remember when you were here in the summer telling me that there was a family skeleton in Mr. Peyton’s household? That is the only thing that is making me hesitate. I do not want to marry a big family skeleton, Bob. A few little ones I should not mind. But I am afraid of a very, very big *bones*.’

‘ I do not think you need be afraid. I remember very well what I said. I had been told that was the case. But I think my informant exaggerated. I do not believe that there was any real skeleton—except that Peyton was heartily sick of his wife, and bothered by the children—more particularly by the girl.’

‘Your celebrated Miss “Neglected.” All that was no doubt the case. The wife was a lugubrious creature. And I used to think that Mr. Peyton hated the children. It is certain his wife did. Only, since her death, he has shown distinctly less dislike to them. The girl has a temper: well, I won’t say anything against her, Bob, because I know what is going to happen. Ah, yes, she is your fate, Bob. There is nothing to be said against the son: an inoffensive, studious fellow, perhaps with a touch of his mother’s natural melancholy in his disposition. Really, if that is all, Bob, I do not see why I should hesitate.’

‘There is I think no reason to hesitate. People are so fond of exaggerating. I believe it was exaggeration, from what I have since heard. Of course, I have been in the way of hearing more about the

Peytons since Marmaduke has been engaged to the girl. By-the-way, I saw her with him and his mother.'

'Ah, so you have made the acquaintance of the lady at last.'

'Yes.'—A very indifferent 'yes.'

'You do not seem to have been impressed by your model.'

'I am only glad that I did not know her.'

'Oh, fie, Bob. That is too ungallant.'

'I did not mean it that way. I meant only that artistic impressions should never be based upon too close an acquaintance.'

'You may admire her yet, Bob. She is a girl that grows upon one. I did not see at once what an astonishingly handsome girl she is. One wants to know her, and to see her a good many times, and then she has moments when she is positively superb.'

‘I cannot say I found her so. On the contrary, I think I improved a good deal on the original.’

‘I fancy I have heard you say that before, Bob.—Well, we shall see.’

The Major had the *recherché* dinner promised him, and a choice little breakfast on the following morning.

Afterwards, the young widow walked with him to the coach.

As she strolled back to Wee Nestie, though the scene all around her was hard with winter’s barrenness, Florence was blythe of heart, not dull and sad as she had been in all the brightness of summer. She was a woman of firm purposes, and one of her purposes was accomplished.

Nevertheless, she once more looked at the miniature, and kissed it, and said,

‘You will not mind, darling, will you? You will understand.’

Two days afterwards, Mr. Peyton proposed to her. She had paid Eleanor a visit, and, leaving the house, met Mr. Peyton returning to it. He turned back to accompany her,—‘as far as the lodge,’ he said.

But before long he was speaking of having for some days wished to find an opportunity of talking with her alone, and soon, whilst she walked at his side, her eyes on the ground, conscious of being a little in a flutter, was saying,

‘I am not a young man, Mrs. Dromere, and you must forgive me if I am too prosaic: only you and I had a little talk once about second marriages, did we not? And I think that we understand each other. I am the last representative of an old family, Mrs. Dromere,—excepting, of course, my son—but my son gives me reasons for thinking that he may never



marry, and that I should make some one else my heir. In fact, I am a man who must marry again. I may not be able to offer you a young man's passion : and you might perhaps not care to accept it if I could. But I can assure you of my sincere esteem ; and, if you would consent to become my wife, I know of no other woman to whom I could with so much confidence entrust my happiness.'

'You are doing me a great honour, Mr. Peyton—and I do understand,' said Florence.

What she was wishing all the time was that she could avoid thinking of the passionate declaration George made her, and the confusion of happiness with which she on that occasion found herself bewildered.

'May I hope that you will accept me, Mrs. Dromere?'

They had both stopped, and he held out his hand.

Florence Dromere laid hers in it.

‘ Yes, Mr. Peyton : and I will try to be a good wife to you.’

He walked with her all the way to Wee Nestie, and they stood for five or ten minutes talking at the gate before parting.

When he was gone, Florence entered the house, and laying her hat and cloak on the sofa at once sat down by the fire to think.

She was thankful—so thankful! No more pinching and managing. No more of the humiliations of a poverty difficult to conceal. No more anxieties about the trades-people’s bills, no more going without new gloves, or a yard or two of ribbon, no more difficulties because an account was a pound or two more than she had

anticipated ! Oh, how thankful she was ! how thankful from her heart !

He understood her too. He would not be discontented with her because she could not return the transports of an all-consuming passion. He no more anticipated impossibilities than she did. He esteemed her, and she could respect him. He was an honourable, upright man. He would give her a comfortable home, and she would make him a good wife.

‘ Oh, I am glad I came here ! ’ she said to herself. ‘ And I am thankful that I am going to have a good home. I am so thankful ! ’

She was a good girl, the young widow, though she was so very anxious to be married again ; though her views about that second marriage were so frankly mercenary ; and though she had a masterful will of her own—no one is any the worse

for having a strong will. But she was not, on that account, any less liable than the rest of her sex to cost men very dear.

When Mr. Peyton reached home, he acquainted Eleanor with the news.

‘Oh, uncle dear, I am *so* glad,’ said Eleanor, kissing him. ‘I like Mrs. Dromere: she is always so *nice*. I hope you will be very, very happy. I am *sure* you will, uncle dear: much happier than you were before.’

Eleanor was one of the people who had made a guess at what was going to happen. Had she not done so, she would have been more poorly endowed with the faculty of observation than any woman in her right senses yet created. Now that it had happened, she was very pleased. She enjoyed the small element of excitement, and she was also of opinion that ‘dear uncle’ would be much happier when he

was married again. Poor aunty, who was gone, was a great sufferer—and sometimes a great trial: a trial even to herself, poor dear! She was happier where she was now.

According to Eleanor's lights, most things were happier as they were than they had ever been before; and could not be happier than they were, unless some inevitable change was evidently impending, in which case Eleanor felt certain that, after it, things would be happier than they were now.

She was convinced at present that it was so much happier for everyone that her engagement with Lennox was broken off—happier for Lennox, because he and she would not really have suited each other; happier for her, because it was generally better for a girl to marry a man whom she had not known when she was

a child—that was the reason she gave herself, and it did as well as any other; happier for ‘dear uncle,’ because he so much wished the match broken off; she could never have crossed a wish of ‘dear uncle’s,’ and happier too for ‘poor Rosamond,’ because if Lennox did after all marry, which did not seem very likely, he might choose himself a bride whom Rosamond would like.

‘Oh, yes, it is ever so much happier for everyone as it is,’ said Eleanor.

Perhaps she enjoyed her liberty a little, not having cared much more for her cousin than for anyone else, and having accepted him merely because she had one of those soft, gentle natures whose instinctive desire to please moulds them easily to other people’s wills. But the real origin of her easy belief in the happiness of everything under the sun was her own possession of

a happy temperament, which made her believe everyone happy simply because she was happy herself.

At the end of the week, Lennox came down from Oxford. Rosamond was to return on the same day, but came by a later train. Only the man-servant with the trap met Lennox at the railway station, and he thought of his arrival in the summer when Rosamond had been on the platform, and he had wondered why Eleanor was not with her.

He was not this time expecting to see Eleanor; and, could Eleanor have known the difference that only not expecting her made to him, she might have felt doubtful whether what had happened was 'happiest for everyone.'

Mr. Peyton himself acquainted him with his engagement within an hour of his arrival.

‘You found the reason I suggested a satisfactory one for all practical purposes?’ asked Lennox.

‘Absolutely so. I hinted at it only. I did not mention it as a certainty.’

‘You may mention it as a certainty, when you please. I have made up my mind. As soon as I have taken my degree I shall be received into the Church of Rome, and begin to study for the priesthood. You see, that puts an end to all difficulties. Besides, I feel the life to be the one for which I was intended.’

‘You are making a sacrifice, Lennox, of unspeakable value to me—only I cannot help feeling that it is a great sacrifice. If it should prove one that you some day repent?’

‘It is not a sacrifice. I feel myself drawn to the Catholic priesthood, in many ways. I fear that Rosamond may



be, at first, distressed. I do not know. I should wish to break my views to her gently.'

'Well. Only do not act precipitately, Lennox. These irrevocable steps are very grave. But I need not tell you that. In any case,' he laid his hand upon his son's shoulder with a touch almost affectionate, such as Lennox never remembered to have received from his father's hands before, 'I am deeply sensible of the unselfishness with which you have behaved. And I thank you, Lennox, from the bottom of my heart I thank you.'

'I am pleased to have gratified you, sir.'

He knew how much was meant by words of even a slight degree of warmth from the stern lips of his father.

Rosamond reached home before dinner. Lennox was in his room finishing tying

his cravat when she knocked at his door.

‘Who is that?’

‘I. Rosamond.’

‘Come in.’

She entered, and, crossing the room, dropped into a chair by his toilet-table. She was already dressed.

‘Lennox, you have broken off your engagement with Eleanor! Why did you not tell me at once, as soon as I came?’

‘I felt sure she would tell you.’

‘When was it broken off, Lennox?’

‘Before I went back to Oxford.’

‘Then you might have told me when you saw me in town. I fancied that you were looking annoyed about something when you were at Mrs. Torres’. Was it about this?’

‘I trust not.’

‘But, Lennox, you used to be mad about her! I cannot understand it a bit. Len-

nox,'—this pointedly—'after I had left, papa and Eleanor concocted this between them, and you let them throw you over! They have treated you infamously, Lennox.'

'On the contrary, it was my wish. Father helped me to explain to Eleanor; and, you know, she did not much care.'

'Your wish!'

'There were reasons. I will tell you all about them some day. There is not time now. I have changed my mind about some things.'

Rosamond had risen.

'If you have changed your mind about Eleanor, I am sure no one is more delighted than I. If only they have not been ill-using you, Lennox.'

Standing by his table, and toying with a bracelet, she continued,

'And I hear that papa is going to marry Mrs. Dromere. That is another horrible

woman ! She is as poor as Job, and of course she is taking papa for his money. But she is Eleanor's friend—and I suppose Eleanor got her the place. At what are you laughing ?'

'I don't think it was like that,' said Lennox, smiling, but becoming graver as he proceeded. 'You know father was not happy with mother. It is not unnatural that he should think of marrying again. A man who has not found happiness in one place is justified in looking for it in another. Besides, father has other reasons—serious ones. That is partly my fault :—connected with the breaking off of my engagement to Eleanor. I will tell you all about that when we have time. And, honestly, I think father will be happy with Mrs. Dromere. She is not such a bad sort.—You are not very much surprised at father's marrying again ?'

‘ I am never surprised at anything papa does.’

‘ That is not fair. Wait till you know a little more about it.’

‘ Have you any idea when papa will marry ?’

‘ As soon as he possibly can. Six months after mother’s death, say.’

‘ That seems rather soon, and not indicative of much respect for mamma’s memory.’

‘ There are reasons.’

Rosamond sat down again.

‘ I shall be glad when I am in a position to form my own opinion of these mysterious reasons,’ she remarked, resting her cheek on her hand. ‘ I have sufficient respect for my mother not to wish to marry quite so soon as papa will ; and that will mean for me some pleasant months with an agreeable step-mother. And afterwards—’

She stopped, and looking up said,

‘Do you know, Lennox, whether papa will disinherit us—you and me?’

‘The money under our mother’s settlements must come to us. Besides, father may be stern but he is not unjust.’

‘That depends upon how you choose to define injustice. Well; we shall have, no doubt, what he cannot keep from us. Only—as for all the rest; do you see what this is coming to, Lennox? You and I are going to be ousted. Our mother is already forgotten. This woman, and her children, if she have any, will step into everything; and you and I shall be—just as if we were not papa’s children at all—outcasts, as we have always been.’

‘I think you are wrong, dear,’ replied her brother, gently. ‘I think you will find that father will be different, now that he is not always in a state of distress, as

he was whilst mother lived.—Listen, that is the dinner-gong.'

They left the room together. On the stairs, Lennox stopped.

'By the way. One thing you have not heard. Eleanor is leaving to spend Christmas in Leicestershire.'

'Really! That is good news, at any rate.'

Eleanor left only two days later. That was Mr. Peyton's doing. He was not of Eleanor's opinion that what had happened was 'happiest for everyone.' Perhaps he had lived too long in this queer world to be able to hold that agreeable opinion. He had managed to get Eleanor invited to stay with friends, that Lennox should be spared the pain of constantly seeing her.

After she was gone, the trio left at Belmont were certainly happier together than

they had ever been before. Rosamond even began to believe that Lennox was right in explaining the change in her father's behaviour as caused by his being no longer always distressed about his wife ; little suspecting that her brother's conduct had purchased her the share of consideration that she enjoyed. In return for so unprecedented a regard on her father's part, she did her best to be pleasant to Mrs. Dromere.

So the Christmas vacation passed very agreeably. By the end of it, Rosamond had grown reconciled to Lennox's new wish to become a priest. Mr. Peyton even said to himself,

‘ I am afraid that in the years past I have not done these young people justice.’

Lennox said to himself,

‘ I always felt that if one of us would



have the courage to make a sacrifice for the others they would be happier.'

And Rosamond said to herself,

'Lennox may say what he likes about a vocation,—and goodness knows that I am more pleased than I can tell that he is not going to marry that Eleanor,—but no one shall ever persuade me to believe that he is going to be a priest for any other reason except that he is broken-hearted about her, poor fellow. And something tells me that I must be on my guard against this Mrs. Dromere.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN misgivings of that sort persistently haunt the imagination, reasons for them generally exist, though they may not have a shape definite enough to be perceptible to the senses. On the whole, humanity, and certainly civilised humanity, errs by attaching rather too little importance to instinctive impressions than in the contrary direction.

However, for the present, nothing ensued to justify Rosamond's secret antipathy to her future step-mother. Lennox returned to Oxford, and Eleanor came back

to Belmont. The weeks passed uneventfully, and, on the whole, pleasantly, and the spring approached. In March Marmaduke Torres spent a few days at Belmont, during which Rosamond was as happy as a queen. After his departure, the ordinary course of events proceeded exactly as before. Rosamond found her father distinctly more considerate than he had ever shown himself during her mother's lifetime, and she retained her position as mistress of the establishment in which he had installed her during her cousin's absence, although the house was Eleanor's. Mr. Peyton seemed to her to take less notice than formerly of Eleanor: though, perhaps, that was because he was spending some of his time with Mrs. Dromere, and was also much occupied with his lawyer. Eleanor was still as enthusiastic as ever about her 'dear uncle,' and judged

everything that he did both faultless and admirable ; but it struck Rosamond that she was often dull, and found the possession of Belmont add very little to her personal happiness.

Thus they reached Easter. Lennox did not come home for the vacation, preferring to spend it at Oxford, where he was reading hard for his now approaching final examination. Later in April, Mr. Peyton and Mrs. Dromere were married very quietly in London. Mrs. Peyton had been dead a little over six months, and a good many people talked. A good many people cannot help talking. It is an infirmity they have acquired, like others acquire a weakness for drinking. And they talk, in such words as they possess, about everything that reaches their ears only because their tongues are affected with ' chorea '—a disease consisting of ' a tendency to in-

voluntary and irregular movements, the mind and functions of the brain being generally unaffected.'

But, amongst some of Mr. Peyton's most intimate friends in Leicestershire, his conduct was by no means condemned. 'His son,' it was said, 'is resolved upon becoming a Catholic priest, and Mr. Peyton must either have another heir or see the name of a county family extinguished. He is not a young man, and may reasonably wish to lose no time if he desires to see his heir reaching manhood.' And, of course, the behaviour of Lennox was censured.

Yet perhaps it was out of consideration for the people affected with chorea of the tongue that Mr. Peyton, after a short honeymoon, brought his bride back to Belmont instead of to his own house in Leicestershire. True, the latter house was

being thoroughly refurnished, cleaned, painted, papered, and utterly turned upside down against her future arrival—but possibly that was rather an excuse for remaining awhile in Devonshire than a reason.

The bride, upon her return, received a sincere welcome from both Rosamond and Eleanor, who were growing heartily tired of each other's society, and forthwith announced her intention of effecting a change in the somewhat gloomy and cheerless manner of existence into which Mr. Peyton's household had drifted under the rule of its previous mistress.

‘Your father's spirits want raising, my dear,’ she said to Rosamond. ‘All these years of constant anxiety have quite depressed him. He seems almost to have forgotten what enjoying himself means. That will never do, you know. We must

cheer him up. I am going to make the house bright, and everyone in it happy; to invite plenty of visitors, and to have something going on that may amuse and interest us all. I have talked to your father about it, and he quite agrees with me. And so, by way of commencement, I shall invite Marmaduke Torres down here at once, and my cousin, Major Bob, to meet him. You will like to have Marmaduke, will you not? And I shall like to have Bob: he and I are old friends.'

Naturally Rosamond had nothing to say against Marmaduke's coming, and therefore replied,

'Certainly I shall enjoy having Marmaduke here, mamma.'

She had much gratified Mr. Peyton by raising no objection to calling Florence 'mamma.'

'It will not be difficult, papa, for her to

be kinder to me than my own mother was, if she chooses,' was the only remark she made on the subject.

Well, inviting Marmaduke looked like kindness. Still Rosamond was not altogether assured.

'I do not quite trust my new mamma,' she said to herself. 'Somehow her considerateness reminds me of the generosity with which I used to be offered jam—when there were powders in it. I should like to know of what else she is thinking.'

The new Mrs. Peyton was thinking,

'Now, I shall just show Bob that I was right, and that he is in love with Rosamond without knowing it. That will be an excellent beginning. Bob is always capital company when he is well fed, and we shall be able to feed him : and he and Rosamond will find out in less than a fortnight that they were made for each other. It is



quite time that Bob was married, and she is just the sort of strange, showy, troublesome creature an artist wants to keep him amused ; and not at all the wife for a lazy, lounging man like Marmaduke, who takes a fancy to every handsome face he sees, and will be sure to do something that will put her out, and make them both as miserable as they can be ; and his dear, quiet old mother, too, who indulges him in all his follies. Marmaduke will not like it at first. But he will soon get over it. If he must marry some one, there is Eleanor ; a nice quiet girl—the better off of the two—and likely to be a much more congenial person to that dear old woman, his mother.’

Thus Florence to herself, very sure in her own mind, first of all, that Major Bob and Rosamond were intended for each other ; secondly, that Marmaduke should marry Eleanor, and thirdly, that she was

going to manage the happiness of them all as successfully as she had managed her own.

Both the invitations were at once accepted, Marmaduke's for reasons which it may be hoped need no explanation even in these *fin de siècle* days, the Major's because he was not particularly busy, and reflected, 'I should like to see what Florence has done for herself. And, if the place is pretty, I may pick up a few sketches.'

The first two or three days after the arrival of the visitors passed very pleasantly. Some others had been invited besides Marmaduke and the artistic Major, but they need not be particularised, as they have no immediate connection with this history. Though the house at Belmont had been a little improved since it had become Eleanor's personal possession,

it was still not quite home ; only, now, its lodging-house air had become, under Florence's gay *régime*, the air of a temporary residence in which a merry party were leading a hey-day, picnicing, happy-go-lucky life, easier by far than was possibly conceivable in any home, so that enjoyment was not at all difficult. Yet by the end of the third or fourth day one of the party was not altogether contented with the manner in which things were being managed.

That was Rosamond : and the reason was simple. She had that afternoon promised herself a drive with Marmaduke. However, the Major thought the afternoon just the one for a sketch of a locality about eight miles off, and she was the only person in the house who knew the road thither. Accordingly, with a married lady of the party as chaperone, she drove

Eleanor and the Major to the spot in question. The Major was delighted with his sketch. Eleanor attempted a humble little water-colour—not altogether unsuccessful—and had the benefit of his tuition. The chaperone was enthusiastic about the scenery. And Rosamond wondered which of the chaperone's daughters would secure Marmaduke Torres's society in her absence, and said to herself,

‘So much for my new mamma's indulgent consideration for my wishes.’

It also occurred to her that she might very often be required to drive the Major hither and thither, as she had, owing to her natural restlessness, and those long excursions which she had been taking with her brother all through the summer vacation, a far wider knowledge of the neighbourhood than any one else at Belmont.

That turned out to be the case, only, on the next occasion, she promptly remarked without circumlocutions, that she preferred Marmaduke's society to the Major's.

‘Naturally, dear,’ rejoined Mrs. Peyton, with a laugh. ‘Only let me ask you to reflect that it looks weak in an engaged girl not to be able to quit her *fiancé* for a moment—as if she belonged to him like a dog: that you will have plenty of time for seeing Marmaduke, and talking to him by and by: and that you really ought to be a little nice to poor Bob. You do not suppose, do you, that a man paints a picture of a girl, such as he painted of you, without having thought about her a good deal?’

In the end, Rosamond consented to be the Major's guide on this occasion also, but that was principally because Marmaduke asserted that he had ‘no end of

letters to write,' and would devote the morning to them.

On her return, however, it appeared that only one of the letters had been written, and that Marmaduke had been strolling about the grounds with Eleanor, who had not this time accompanied Rosamond. It was difficult for Marmaduke to sit still for more than twenty minutes at a time.

It was after that had been confessed to her in the verandah before luncheon that Rosamond had her first moment of misgiving.

A few feet from her was the square of marble upon which he had stood that afternoon when he told her that 'he was not blind.'

'If they would only leave him and me alone together! What do I care for all the rest of the world?' she exclaimed in

herself, with that passionate individualism that is so integral a part of all such natures as hers. 'I believe mamma is *managing* all this. She is always scheming something.'

Yes. Florence was a woman of schemes, mostly successful ones in the end.

She also heard of that stroll of Marmaduke's in the grounds with Eleanor, and chaffed him about it.

To chaff him was so easy for her. The love which he made to her when she had been a widow but a year, and he was still an undergraduate, was such desperate love, such comic love. And his misery after he was finally refused so deplorable—during the six weeks which it lasted. She never saw him without teasing him about that love-affair, and he took her banter with good temper, laughing at himself quite as much as she laughed at him,

when she asked him whether he remembered assuring her that if she would not marry him 'his life would not be long,' or how he had told her how he felt for his mother 'who would miss him.' 'Infantine, was it not, Marmaduke?' she would say, and he reply, with a laugh, 'Unspeakable!' Sometimes too she would amuse herself with inquiring after more recent admirations of his. 'What became, Marmaduke, of the girl with golden hair whom you met at Brighton?' or, 'Has the Kentish rector's daughter yet married your rival?' or, 'Where is the bewitching Lady Violet now?' To most of which questions his answer was a laughing 'I am sure I don't know.' Numerous as the ladies were, she somehow remembered them all, and never omitted to point out to him the probability of the present reigning beauty shortly



attaining to the oblivion enjoyed by all her predecessors.

On this occasion she remarked,

‘So it is going to be Eleanor now, Marmaduke? You must not forget that this time you are engaged. That makes inconstancy culpable, you know. But Eleanor is a dear girl.’

She purposely avoided making any remarks about Rosamond. The time for them had not yet arrived.

But a week later she was more outspoken. Before that, Rosamond had observed to her sweetheart,

‘You and I do not seem to see much of each other, Marmaduke. Mamma is always sending me hither and thither. Is she making use of you in the same fashion too?’

‘Well, yes, she is rather. I suppose,

you see, that she regards me as one of the family, in a sort of way, and thinks it right that I should help to amuse other people.'

'I wish they were all a hundred miles away, and you and I together,' said Rosamond.

## CHAPTER IX.

IN consequence of that, the next time Florence's plans consisted in sending her one way and Marmaduke another, he protested. If Florence chaffed him that gave him the privilege of speaking plainly to her, and he said at once,

‘I think I should prefer some other arrangement, by which Rosamond and I went together.’

‘I know: of course. Only don't refuse this time, there's a dear boy. You have no notion how difficult it is to keep people amused. I must rely a little on

you. Rosamond has been saying something to you, I suppose?’

‘Yes. I think that is natural, you know.’

Florence laughed.

‘You are always so terribly *épris*, while it lasts, are you not, Marmaduke?’

And she began to talk a little freely about Rosamond, posing as a person who had observed her and knew a good deal about her.

‘Has Miss Rosamond been making you scenes,’ she enquired, playfully. ‘Oh, I am aware of her little weaknesses. She is jealous of your knowing what colour any other girl’s hair is, is she not?’

Marmaduke thought of the photographs of Miss Violet Knaresborough. Meanwhile, Florence ran on,

‘You must be prepared for that, you know. There will be terrible doings if

you change your mind this time, Marmaduke. Only, really, I do not know whether you and she are particularly suited for each other. You ought to have come to Wee Nestie and to have had a little talk with me, you silly boy, before you plunged.'

Marmaduke was thinking,

'Likely I should do that! This woman was always a fool! Imagining that she can manage everyone's affairs for them, better than they can manage them themselves! Just like all these women!'

Only, as Florence did not know what he was thinking, she continued,

'I think of your mother, Marmaduke. I know she is very much pleased with Rosamond. But then, in town, Rosamond was on her very best behaviour, was she not? And you know, Marmaduke, your mother, dear old lady, spoils you so, and is

so absolutely persuaded that every thing you do is the perfection of good sense, that were you to announce an intention of marrying a ballet-girl, or a crossing-sweeper, your mother would welcome the young lady with open arms, and find her charming for your sake. Only, when a man has a mother like that, Marmaduke, the very indulgence she shows him should make him doubly anxious rather to consider her happiness than to take advantage of her maternal weakness. This is a *farouche* sort of bride that you are going to take to your dear, gentle old mother, Marmaduke. You must know that as well as I do. You ought to have picked out some quiet, amiable, comforting girl who would have been companionable with the old lady. You don't expect Rosamond, who is as restless as yourself, to sit contentedly by the fire-side knitting with

your mother whilst you wander all over the world, do you? Only, my dear Marmaduke, I don't know why I am talking about all that. Just at present I only want you to help me a little to amuse my visitors. Rosamond, if she does not go with you, goes with Bob: who is a little bit smitten, poor man. Of course that is the secret of the picture. Rosamond's vanity was gratified by that picture—very naturally. She feels a little kindly towards him. Any girl would.'

The sting of that speech was in the tail. Marmaduke did not believe what was said. He laughed at it. And his opinion of Florence was by no means a high one. Yet he did think about what she had told him of Rosamond and the Major. Was the Major smitten? It seemed likely enough. And Rosamond a little indulgent because her vanity had been flattered?

She had very little vanity. That was one of her charms. Only Florence had said that any girl would under the circumstances feel kindly towards the man. That insinuated Rosamond's being like all other girls.

Was there anything under the sun more monotonous than this universal similitude of the feminine sex?

He did not think of what Florence had previously remarked respecting bestowing some attention upon Eleanor. Yet in Rosamond's absence he had rather unconsciously dropped into a way of falling back upon her society.

Why? He could not have said why. Indeed, he was himself scarcely conscious that he talked to her quite so often as he did. Mere accidents led to their being together; though, perhaps, there was nothing unnatural in his being more inti-



mate with the niece of the man whose daughter he was to marry, than with the other visitors who were comparatively strangers to him. Eleanor, too, seemed at times to seek his society, quitting the Major, who might be giving her a few artistic hints, or whose work she might be watching, to talk to him.

Changes had taken place in Eleanor since she was no longer engaged to Lennox. Every woman is to a certain extent a reflection of the man to whom she belongs, an unconscious reflection, but one that displays very clearly the impulses, wishes, ambitions, and modes of thought of the mind that stands first in her estimation. With an essentially pliable nature like Eleanor's, it was inevitable that this should be the case in a marked degree. As the *fiancée* of the studious Lennox, she had been full of studious, thoughtful, his-

torical tastes, which the excellent education she had received enabled her to pursue intelligently. Only, now that she was no longer engaged to Lennox, those tastes had rapidly died a natural death—so completely does the instinct of women of her kind prompt them merely to show themselves what some one of the opposite sex would admire. Just at present it seemed that if Eleanor were much thrown with Marmaduke, she might become almost as restless as Rosamond; if much with Major Bob, might develop her little knack of sketching into artistic proclivities; if much with this or that man, might with the facility of a Proteus metamorphose herself into whatsoever seemed most likely to be agreeable to the taste of the given individual. It was observable that she talked a good deal less about her ‘dear uncle,’ to whom she was becoming rapidly of small import-

ance now that he had a new wife ; nor were indications wanting of a disposition to find some one to fill the post that Lennox had vacated.

In short, now that Eleanor's circumstances began to suggest that she might do well to look after her own interest, Eleanor, who was invariably just what it was worth her while to be—though always in the prettiest, gentlest manner imaginable—was becoming, with all the rapidity the situation demanded, as finished a man-hunting coquette as if she had been the most empty-headed of her sex.

There was a grain of truth in Marmaduke Torres's conviction that the majority of women are all alike. On the other hand, it is only just to add that the exceptional young ladies are apt to prove difficult to manage, whilst those who, like Eleanor, instinctively conform themselves

to their circumstances, make good wives of a very companionable sort.

It was not, therefore, Marmaduke's fault alone if something occasionally went on between him and Eleanor not unlike a little meaningless flirtation. Though it is true that he was always liable to be impressed by a pretty face, and Eleanor was undeniably pretty. And he was possibly not indisposed to philander a little with his *fiancée's* cousin. It is natural to every man to philander with his *fiancée's* pretty sisters, cousins, friends, or other presentable feminine belongings, as natural as that he should chum with her brothers, and loathe her male acquaintance.

Florence looked on, and said to herself with a smile,

‘ I knew how it would be. Marmaduke will take Eleanor, and Bob Rosamond, and

we shall have them rightly paired at last after all.'

All of a sudden Rosamond saw good to be jealous. The immediate occasion of her jealousy was absolutely nothing : that goes without saying. Still, this was only what was to be anticipated.

There was a kind of garden-party at the rectory, a vastly dull one. Both Rosamond and Eleanor were amongst the guests, as was also Marmaduke. In the course of the afternoon the latter procured Eleanor an ice, and sat with her in a sort of little bower whilst she ate it. The ice was about half finished when Torres caught sight of Rosamond looking at him across the lawn.

He had seen that look before—when he was showing her the photographs of Miss Violet Knaresborough—and, in an instant,

realised that he had made a mistake which was going to have disagreeable consequences. Getting away from Eleanor as fast as he could—a little to her surprise, it must be confessed—he set forth in quest of Rosamond, who showed some ingenuity in avoiding him.

When he at last succeeded in joining her, she exhibited a marked distaste for his society, had only monosyllabic replies to make to his observations, and no remark of her own to offer in return.

That lasted also all the evening.

Howbeit the rapidity and facility with which people who are in love make up their quarrels have been proverbial since the days of Menander—and were possibly proverbial long before that. On the morrow, having been cool with her lover for nearly twenty-four hours, and altogether indisposed to accept explanations,

or even to hear them, Rosamond suddenly relented.

Peace, however, was not made this time so rapidly as in London.

The precise moment of her repentance was during a drive that she was taking with her step-mother and two of their visitors. The drive was dull—or she found it so,—and she had plenty of time for reflection. Having repented, she resolved to speak to Marmaduke as soon as she reached home. Unluckily, when she reached home, he and the Major were out. They had gone for a walk. So the next thing was to meet him on his return. Waiting as long as she could for him to come back, she made herself so nearly late for dinner, that the party were crossing to the dining-room when she came down stairs. After dinner, when the men had returned to the drawing-room, she thrice at-

tempted to approach him, but was on two occasions balked by Florence's stopping her on her way to say something to her, and on the third had the mortification of seeing one of the other girls join him just before she reached him. The party broke up for the night without her having been able to speak to him, though she did wish him good-night. She did so looking into his face with a smile, but could see that he supposed himself still in disgrace.

‘I ought to have detained him, to have told him that I wanted to say a word to him,’ she said to herself, as she went to her room. ‘Only I thought he would have understood me. Never mind. I have to-morrow.’

But on the morrow he was late for breakfast, and before he had appeared, Florence wanted her to go to the village. On her return he had started for a ride.



She herself was not in at the ordinary luncheon-time, because she had to drive one of the girls staying in the house to the station, to meet a particular train. When she came back it had begun to rain, and it fell to her lot to remain with the elder ladies in the drawing-room, because Florence wanted to transact some business with Mr. Peyton. Meanwhile, she knew that Marmaduke was with Eleanor and the other girls in the billiard-room. To conclude the day, he went to dine at the rectory, at a bachelor dinner, and Rosamond did not see him the whole day.

The following afternoon she at last managed to secure him for a little stroll in the grounds, and they cleared up the misunderstanding. But the reconciliation at the end of three days seemed tame and cold: it had an air of being so utterly wanting in readiness and spontaneity.

‘ And he thinks it so. I can see that he does,’ she said to herself. ‘ He only half believes that I have been trying to speak to him for two whole days.—If Lennox were only here to help me !’

Lennox was in a few days going in for his final examination, and it was impossible to think of bringing him down.

Marmaduke Torres did hardly believe that she had been trying very seriously to speak to him. And three days’ sulks appeared to him distinctly long. But he thought of the adventure on the river, and made allowances. After all, she was not like all the rest. But he was becoming a little bewildered—and a little bored—in the whirl of this gay house of Florence’s, where something was to be perpetually going on to keep everyone bright, happy, and amused. It was not a bit like coming to see his *fiancée* had been in the old days.

He attempted also to explain his feeling on that subject to her.

Unluckily, she had spied in the interim from 'The Eagles' Nest,' Eleanor accompanied by him and the Major. During the last few days she had resumed her old solitary rambles in the woods, stealing out of the house when she could do so unobserved, and leaving her step-mother to be as much inconvenienced as she pleased.

The consequence of that was that when Marmaduke proposed,

'Would it not be better if I left now, and came back to see you when there are not quite so many people down here, and we could see more of each other?'

She replied indifferently,

'And when is that going to be?'

'I am sure I do not know, but perhaps you do.'

‘Not at all.’

‘What can we do, then?’

She looked at him placidly, with an interrogative regard of the softest kind in her deep eyes.

‘I think,’ she proposed, ‘that it would be best for me to try to make some other men fall in love with me—I mean two at once. That would not occasion you any misgiving, because each of the rivals would take care that I did not marry the other. Then if you would take up with some other girl besides Eleanor, I, too, should feel quite comfortable for a similar reason; and, when the time came, we should be ready for each other in the most agreeable manner imaginable, should we not?’

With which she rose from her seat and walked away, leaving him to form his own reflections.

‘Well! I wonder whether any man had

anything like that said to him before?' was his first thought. 'Never mind. That is what I like her for. Only, we shall never make things right whilst all these people are down here. I wish they were all——' Very likely he did not really wish it. So the conclusion of the sentence may be omitted. 'If I could only get her to myself. If we could only have some of our old drives and walks.'

But Florence was providing against these.

And, in the evening of the same day, Florence gave Rosamond a little motherly advice.

'A girl should have spirit, my dear. Of course you are annoyed at seeing Marmaduke paying perpetual attentions to Eleanor. Only, you know, he was always like that; falling in love with each pretty face he sees, and forgetting all his pre-

vious admirations. But it is feeble, my dear, to let him see that you mind it. Give him a lesson : and show him that two people can play at that game. Flirt with the Major.'

Rosamond drew herself up with offended dignity.

'I am not that sort of girl,' she said, proudly. 'If Marmaduke is guilty of inconstancy, it will be unpardonable—because he knows how I shall feel it. But *I* am not going to be contemptible.'

## CHAPTER X.

‘Look here, Marmaduke, there are limits even to my patience!’

The speaker was Rosamond. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that.

They stood, facing each other, in the library, near the open window, through which the last of the late summer evening’s fainting radiance shone into the dusky, unlighted room. No one visited the library in the evenings.

Outside a dim, pearly halo of light hung high in the north-west, beautiful above the almost black foliage of the trees.

Lower down amidst their boughs was a crimson patch or two, the last remnants of a magnificent sunset, that had lit the western sky whilst the house-party were all at dinner.

In the semi-gloom of the room, Marmaduke's white shirt-front and collar and tie shone—a great white patch—but his companion's tall, slight figure detached itself only imperfectly from the obscurity around her. Still the light caught her face, sparkling dimly in her eyes, and fell softly on her throat, so fair in its contrast to her black dinner-dress.

He was looking at her with surprise, really noticing most of all, as a man would, how dark were her hair and eyes, and her throat how snowy white, whilst she regarded him with flashing pupils, with her bosom heaving and her little hands clenched, with her figure almost



rigid in the paroxysm of exasperation that had suddenly possessed her.

That exasperation was far too intense to permit of her perceiving something almost droll in the expression she had used, 'There are limits even to my patience.' As if her patience was of a sort whose limits were at any time difficult to overstep.

She was far too angry to think of such trifles as that.

It was in the drawing-room that she had suddenly swooped upon him.

A moment before, she had been assisting Eleanor to remove some rather heavy volumes of music from a whatnot. The books were heaped one above another, and, in attempting to draw out one of the lower ones, they brought them all down with a crash, Marmaduke managing to catch one of Eleanor's hands and snatch

it aside, but just in time to prevent her fingers receiving a sharp blow between the boards of one of the big volumes and the shelf.

He held the little white hand in his for a moment, a plumper, weaker hand than Rosamond's, looking at it, and saying,

‘Not hurt?’

Eleanor laughed, replying ‘No,’ and looking into his face, as she withdrew her hand very leisurely. They proceeded to pick up the volumes together.

They were so occupied, when Rosamond came upon them.

The fall of the books had made everyone look up, and a girl sitting by her remarked laughingly,

‘Look at Mr. Torres and Miss Kirby! Why is he holding her hand? She looks as if she rather liked it.’

Rosamond was already looking at Mar-

maduke and Eleanor, and rose on the spot.

As she approached them, Eleanor was in the act of giving Marmaduke a little pat, saying,

‘Take away your great clumsy hands ! It was you that brought the books down.’

‘Oh, I say, you know, if you strike me I shall claim my rights,’ replied Marmaduke.

‘Marmaduke, I want to speak to you,’ sounded Rosamond’s voice behind him.

He scrambled up from the floor, on which he was kneeling to hand the fallen books to Eleanor, and answered,

‘Yes?’

‘Not here. Wait a moment.’

She drew him aside, leaving Eleanor to arrange the music alone, and, waiting till they were not observed, beckoned him to

follow her out of the room, and so led him to the library.

It was only when they reached the window, that she abruptly turned upon him to protest, whilst her bosom heaved so that she could scarcely speak,

‘Look here, Marmaduke, there are limits even to my patience.’

It was a minute or so before he spoke, a part of the time was spent in admiring her.

‘You are vexed, dear? I am awfully sorry. Of course, I have done something I should not: I am afraid I don’t know what it is. Only, I’m awfully sorry.’

‘Don’t know!’ she retorted, stepping up to him, almost as if she was going to strike him. ‘You don’t know! You are not aware that everyone in the house is remarking upon the way in which you are going on with Eleanor? You have not

heard of the things they are saying? But I should imagine that you could guess.'

'What magnificent eyes!'—That was what Marmaduke was thinking.

He remarked aloud,

'What they are saying? Why—because all those books tumbled all over us?'

'They would not have tumbled over you, if you had not been with her—as usual.'

He understood what was the matter now.

'Tell me what they say,' he asked, sitting down on a chair near her.

He spoke gently, a little unconcernedly. The drift of her passionate moods was not unknown to him: and he had found this kind of gentleness the most likely to soothe her.

But that had been on minor occasions, by far different from this, when the events of the last fortnight had suddenly culminated in the explosion upon which her step-mother had been all along calculating.

Turning a little, with an abrupt movement, so as still to face him, and herself remaining standing, she flashed back instantly,

‘Was there occasion to say? Cannot I see? Am I blind? Are you not always with her, driving with her, riding with her, walking with her all day long? Are you not as often as not at her side at table? Were you not playing billiards with her the whole afternoon? I know what you are going to say: that it is all mamma’s doing: but you are willing enough to fall in with all that is proposed that brings you and her together, and provides you with opportunities of making *doux yeux*,

whispering confidences into her ears, toying with her hands, and offering to kiss her. What should people say when everyone sees how you are going on? You are treating me shamefully, shamefully! When you know, too, how I hate her.'

Marmaduke Torres was grateful for the gloom in the room. It enabled him to press his lips together, and to say to himself, 'She is in a bad rage this time—one a good deal worse than usual,' without his thoughts being legible in his features.

Meanwhile, she had flung herself down on a chair by her brother's writing-table, and, tapping impatiently with her foot upon the floor, began toying with the things he had left in a tray—an ivory paper-knife, and the Spanish poniard with which he sliced the edges of his manuscript volumes, a round ruler, a big,

bell-shaped pen-wiper, and some similar things. Taking up one of them after the other, to toss each back into the tray in turn, with a kind of nervous, irritable restlessness, she ran on,

‘ I suppose you are making love to her, are you not ? She has captivated you too, in the end. You have found her irresistible, as everyone finds her, papa, mamma, and Lennox. A pretty price Lennox is going to pay for his infatuation ! It is a pretty price that papa has paid, only, of course, no one can grudge anything for Eleanor ! Neither papa his money, nor Lennox his happiness—nor you your honour. Only you are treating me shamefully.—Don’t speak to me, sir !’—Perceiving, only too easily, that with every word she spoke, she was working herself up into a fiercer state of excitement, Marmaduke had attempted to make a remark.—



‘You are making love to another girl before my eyes—wilfully—because you wish me to *see* how I am insulted. Only,’—her voice suddenly dropped, with a ring of despair that was touching to hear,—‘you might have thought of this before you spoke to me. I begged you to do so. I was ready to forego the happiness which you were offering me—rather than that you should pledge yourself to a girl whom you might find too unfortunate to be loved.’—She threw aside the ivory paper-knife into the tray, and continued, resting her cheek on one hand, whilst the other hung at her side, and her eyes sank to the floor.—‘I told you that I was not what you thought me : that I was not a good girl. I asked you to reflect what you would do, if you some day discovered that you might have chosen more wisely. I warned you that you had no

idea of the things of which I am capable when my jealousy is aroused. It was after I had implored you,'—she again looked up at him,—‘to think of all these things that you still pressed your suit. It was worse than cruel, after I had made that appeal to you, to take me, and then to be unfaithful to me as you are now; it was inhuman, monstrous, unpardonable! Because you *are* unfaithful to me. After all that passed between us, you are courting my cousin. And I have never loved anyone but you. Of all the world you alone ever made me first in your affections, and I——’

She broke off, but only to resume instantly,

‘You do not understand what I am saying. You have had many people to love you. You can know nothing about having had only one—and having been

wronged by that one. I had far rather you had shot me. I told you so. I told you not to let me live to know that you were tired of me. It is a shameful thing that you have done to me; shameful! an infamy!

Her last sentences were spoken hurriedly with a voice wherein her angrier and more pathetic tones, now bitter with passion, now low with pain, mingled in rapid succession reflecting something of the confusion of her thoughts, but again rising at the close to an accent of fierce resentment.

What was a man who sincerely loved her to reply?

He felt for her. He had some notion of the mental torture she was suffering; and he had a touching recollection of the appeal she had made to him when he proposed to her, whilst to do her any wrong

was the furthest of all things from his thoughts. But no woman so angry could be expected to listen to reason. Apology seemed the only thing possible, and he began to offer her one.

But the very first words he uttered proved the occasion of some new affront, a fresh goad to madden her—why, he had not the remotest notion. In an instant she had started from her seat, and was again protesting the heartless inhumanity with which he had treated her.

‘As if I were here to be insulted with apologies! What apologies are these for such abominations? Apologies!—words! Can all the words under the sun balance my wrongs?’

Her wrongs! The words almost choked her! Wrongs at his hands! To be wronged by the man she loved!

For she did love him. How she loved

him ! Loved him with all the violence of that fierce passionate nature of hers ! Loved him whilst she hated the things he did : loved him all the time that he was maddening her jealousy by what she considered his infidelities. Only the agony of her heart all the while yearning towards him, of her breast tender for him all the while, and aching only with one drear wish, that before he had let her see him prefer any other to her, he had really done as she had bade him, taken her life and let her, without a doubt of his loyalty, die in his arms.

For a little space he was silent, reflecting that, after all, perhaps the wisest way with an angry woman was to let her be angry, and to say nothing. But she soon noticed his silence.

‘ You sit there saying nothing ! Have you no explanation then to give me ? ’

She stood leaning against the table, upon the edge of which one of her hands was clasped with rigid fingers, waiting for his answer.

Marmaduke was conscious of a shadow of fear coming into his mind. It is not cowardice in a man to feel fear, when the occasion of his fear is a woman whom he would not wound for the world. He was asking himself how this was to end. He had seen something of the darker side of his *fiancée's* temperament, and had a conviction that he understood how to curb her perversities. But he had never seen her like this, as she stood now, leaning back against the table literally quivering with passion and utterly unmanageable. He reflected, with misgiving, that he had tried speaking to her gently, had tried silence, had tried apology, all with the like result of only rendering her more excited

than before. He could think of nothing else that he might try. She would not let him speak : and she would not let him be silent. Certainly it was possible to leave her. Only he shrank from that. The action would be pusillanimous. It would be like a defeat and a desertion both at once. She had a right to expect that, happen what might, he would stay at her side.

He rose and came to her, observing as he did so the suspicion with which her angry eyes watched his approach, eyes, it seemed to him, scarcely human in their wildness. There was still just light enough in the room to see them.

He tried to lay his hand upon her hand resting on the edge of the table, but she snatched that away.

He began speaking softly, affectionately,  
' Dearest, why should you snatch your

hand from me—listen, my darling—won't you give me your hand?—no, only, dearest, try to believe me—you are mistaken——'

'Oh, am I, indeed!'

'Indeed, love, you are. They have been putting notions into your head,—Florence is a fool. She always was. Why should you believe the things she says? Why should either of us believe the things she says?'

'Ah! So she has been saying things to you, too, has she? About me, of course. What has she said? Tell me what she has said. Tell me!'

That was not the turn he wished affairs to take, but there was no refusing her.

'What? What should you suppose? What she has been saying to you about me—that I pay your cousin attentions?'

'You do pay her attentions. I see



them. I want to know what is said about *me*.'

'Why, of course, just the same. See now, darling, how silly all that they say is—as if I care for your cousin, or you for the Major.'

'Ah! I thought so. She told you that I flirted with the Major! And you, of course, believed it. You would believe anything of me—now. A man will believe anything of a woman he has left off loving.'

She was off again, as angry as ever, and, if it was possible, a little more unmanageable. She began walking up and down the room, passing into the faint light and out of it again, stopping close to him for a moment with her angry eyes flashing into his, and then flinging away again into the shadows, whence only her passionate voice reached him, until the room began

to seem to him haunted, and his head to turn on his shoulders.

He was saying to himself,

‘But this is really awful! Only, I never saw anything like her! She is really grand—splendid. Yet, I am sorry for her, too.’

Suddenly she stopped again close to him.

‘What are you thinking about, standing there all the time by the table, and looking at me? I am a fiend, am I not? If I am, it is you that have made me one,—you wretch! Why do you not leave me? Why do you not go to your gentle, yielding Eleanor?’

Marmaduke thought,

‘Yes, I was sure leaving her would not do.’

But she was running on, standing against the table, close by him, all but touching him.

‘She is a good bit nicer girl than I am, is she not—Eleanor? Why don’t you marry her?’

A sudden light burst upon Marmaduke’s mind, with the thought,

‘By Jove! What an ass I have been! If I had told her at first, I might have prevented all this.’

With a little smile, he said,

‘That is settled already.’

She turned her head to him with a start.

‘Settled! Already!’

‘Why, yes.’

Her dark eyes fixed upon him with a regard of the profoundest contempt that a woman ever bestowed upon a man.

Only her heart was bursting.

Then a sudden light flashed up in her eyes. Her features were turning to the rigidity of stone, and a determination chill as ice crept over her.

Marmaduke Torres was still smiling. He had so complete a surprise to give her, and was only pleased to see its effects enhanced by suspense.

‘ You will not marry her, Marmaduke.’

Her voice was perfectly even—calm—almost cold.

‘ I?’

But the monosyllable was only half-spoken. Whilst he was still uttering it, something flashed before his eyes, and the next instant he started aside with four inches of steel in his breast.

He snatched it out and flung it from him as he fell on the floor.

Rosamond stood by the table motionless. A minute before, when she had suddenly remembered that the poniard she had given Lennox lay on the table behind her, she had known what she was going

to do. And now she knew that she had done it. That was all.

She could see the fallen figure on the floor, but very imperfectly.

He was breathing heavily, but had uttered no cry.

‘Get help, Rosamond,’ he said, faintly.

After that he lay still.

A little while Rosamond waited. She had heard what he said, in a sort of dream, without any such an idea as compliance with the request crossing her brain.

She moved, and knelt by him on the floor.

In a faint—or dead?

If she knew where to find his pulse.—  
No. She could touch him.

Presently she rose again.

‘He is dead.’

She stood in the faint light by the window.

‘I always knew I should do it some day. Now I have done it.’

Where there was a little opening amongst the now black boughs of the trees, one last little patch of sunset red was visible ; she noticed that.

Then she looked again at the figure on the floor.

‘My love!’

## CHAPTER XI.

TURNING, she quitted the room, and softly closed the door behind her.

She paused.

What was the next step? She was not reflecting upon any possibility of escape. She had but this moment done justice upon a recreant, and no thought of the law had yet crossed her mind. She was considering only whether she should at once return to the drawing-room, as if nothing had taken place, or allow herself the luxury of a moment's interval for meditation.

A new thought flashed across her mind  
‘ But—this is an awful thing that I have  
done !’

In a moment she had taken her resolution.

Running upstairs, she put on a hat, and without changing her dinner-dress, but fastening up the skirt a little, so that it should not inconvenience her, threw a light wrap around her, hastily took a card-case, into which she thrust an envelope, from a drawer in her toilet-table, and slipped noiselessly out of the house.

Passing into the woods, she left the grounds by a small gate.

Later, two labourers from an outlying cottage, going into the village by an unfrequented path across the fields, were surprised by the sudden appearance of a young lady in black, who came towards them walking at an unusually rapid pace.



When passing them, she turned her face away as if unwilling to be recognised, and in another minute had again disappeared.

‘Where can ’er be goin’ to?’ asked one of them.

Saving their own cottage, the path led nowhither saving to Wold. It was a short cut thence into the village often used by the servants, the house being by this route not three miles from Belmont.

Further on, where the path crossed the river by a little wooden bridge, the same figure stopped, to look at the water that made a deep pool a few yards below.

But she passed on again, saying,

‘No. I must first see Mrs. Chevalier.’

Mrs. Chevalier was alone in her boudoir, seated in her arm-chair near the hearth, on which the fire burned summer and winter, occupied with her own thoughts, when a knock sounded at the

door. Rousing herself, the old lady looked round slowly. She was not just then expecting anyone; and she seemed to reflect a moment before she answered by ringing her bell.

The servant who entered brought her a card.

‘Miss Peyton,’ she read, in a tone of surprise. ‘Is she here?’

‘In the drawing-room, ma’am.’

‘Tell her I will see her at once. Bring her up here.’

The servant left.

‘What can have happened?’ said Mrs. Chevalier to herself.

‘Miss Peyton,’ announced the servant opening the door.

A moment Rosamond waited, watching from the corners of her eyes until the door was closed, then suddenly unfastening her wrap, and dropping it with her hat upon

the table as she passed, she crossed the room. Before Mrs. Chevalier could rise, she was on her knees by her chair.

‘ You see, I have come !’ she said, and buried her face on the old woman’s knees.

The latter laid her thin hand on her, caressing her hair and her shoulders. Beneath her touch the girl’s figure was quivering with emotion.

And again Mrs. Chevalier said to herself,

‘ What can have happened ?’

At last Rosamond looked up, fixing her eyes on her face with a regard that changed slowly into an expression of surprise and concern.

‘ Oh, dear Mrs. Chevalier, you are not well. You are tired ? I ought not to have come.’

The shadowy smile crossed the old woman’s face.

‘Am I so very much changed, my dear?’

‘You must have been ill—very ill.’

She was looking into an old, old face, a face out of which all the life and strength was gone, in which nothing was left except its own infinite sadness and weariness.

She was thinking,

‘I did not know that there could be such faces as that—so worn and wasted.’

‘I have been ill, dear—not very ill. I shall never be very ill. Only I am an old woman, you see—old in body—and in troubles, my dear, very, very old! Do not mind that. Tell me what has happened. Why have you come?’

Rosamond was still kneeling, but upright now, one of her hands in the old woman’s hands, and her eyes bent on the fire.

Only, as she did not answer, Mrs. Chevalier repeated,

‘Something has happened?’

‘Yes.’

After a moment, she added,

‘Something terrible.’

‘Tell me.’

Rosamond was watching a little blue flame in the fire creep to the end of a log.

At last she turned her face, and looking at the old woman said, slowly,

‘I have killed my lover.’

She rose, and crossing to the other side of the hearth sat down.

It was a minute or more before the old woman regarded her.

She had rested her elbow on the arm of the chair on which she sat, and her cheek was supported on her palm. Her eyelids hung low over her eyes, and her lips were

slightly parted as if in pain. Her breast heaved a little, but she appeared to be becoming gradually mistress of herself.

‘ Presently she will speak,’ said the old woman to herself.

She waited in silence.

As she had believed, the girl presently began to speak in broken sentences.

‘ It was done in a moment. He deserved it. Or—I don’t know. I stabbed him with a poniard of my brother’s, that happened to be lying on the table. Lennox keeps it sharp to cut the edges of his manuscripts.—The temptation comes upon one in a moment—and is irresistible.—One has absolutely no thought of hesitation.—I knew I was going to do it.—That was only a moment before I did do it.—The next instant it was done.—Afterwards—I knew that I had done it: that was all.—I have always known I should do it some day.—

Now, it is done.—I know how terrible it is.—Only he deserved it.—At least—I don't know.—I know nothing except that I have done it.—We have an old friend—a Mr. Jaffray.—He says everything happens by fate.—I wanted to tell you.—No one else has ever been quite kind to me.—And I think I wanted to bid you good-bye.'

'Tell me about it,' said the old woman, when she stopped speaking.

'That is all.—Or, look.'

She held out her right hand. On one of the fingers was a little stain.

'*That* is all,' she said. 'Only, there is nothing in all the world that can wash that out.—There is nothing to tell. When he asked me to marry, I warned him.—I told him what I was.—And then, although he was betrothed to me, he courted my cousin.—He was engaged to both of us at once.'

At last she looked up.

The face of the old woman opposite her was like stone—but illegible.

‘I thought,’ began Rosamond, again dropping her eyes, ‘that perhaps you——’

But she stopped, ‘could pity me,’ she had been going to say. Only, she felt that she must not. Mrs. Chevalier’s griefs were surely too sacred for her to make an appeal to her terrible reminiscences.

‘You thought—yes?’

‘I have forgotten what I was going to say. I am a little confused.’

Again silence.

‘I am afraid that there is such a thing as fate,’ said the old woman, presently.

But the girl made no answer.

Finding that, she asked, very gently,

‘My dear, this is a terrible business. Have you thought at all of what you are going to do?’



‘I?’ She looked up with surprise, almost as if she might have supposed the question to be addressed to some one else. ‘Well—there does not seem to be much choice, does there?’

‘You have come, then, only to tell me, and to bid me good-bye?’

‘That is all.’ She seemed to be speaking in a dream, but added, more consciously, ‘Oh, I should like to say many things. Only—it is no use now, is it?’

The old woman sat watching every word and every movement. Her questions had an aim, and she was rapidly working towards it.

‘You mean by that?’ she asked.

Rosamond rose.

‘I cannot be arrested, you know,’ she said, standing by the fire. ‘I cannot go through all that—the publicity, and the

disgrace—for myself, and for them, whilst—whilst there is the river.’

Mrs. Chevalier said to herself,

‘As I expected.’

Aloud she remarked,

‘Which is shallow.’

‘Not everywhere.’

‘Will you take advice, dear?’

‘Certainly.’

She turned to face the old woman.

‘Stay with me, and sleep here.’

Rosamond sat down again.

‘And—to-morrow?’ she asked.

‘Some sleeps have no to-morrow.’

Rosamond looked up quickly, and their eyes met.

‘You mean you would give me——’ she began.

‘Let us say I mean nothing,’ interrupted the old woman. ‘You are tired. I persuade you to stay here. You might natu-

rally take something before going to bed.'

Rosamond was regarding her steadfastly. A shadow was on her weary face more weary than ever: a face of stone, but of stone that had a will.

'I do not know how I could thank you, Mrs. Chevalier,' she said, slowly. 'You are offering me the one only last kindness that anyone can do me in this world.'

Something went cold to her heart as she spoke, but in accepting she was accepting a last great service.

'Then you will stay here. I will tell them that you will have your old room. I will see to it myself, dear.'

She rose.

But before she had crossed the room—with steps so much slower than when Rosamond was last at Wold—the latter was at her side.

'Oh, dear Mrs. Chevalier, let us think

for one moment. Do not let me—I mean, I think of you. I mean—afterwards.’

‘No one will know.’

‘You are sure?’

‘I am an old woman, my dear, and know many things: and my father was a medical man: and I am quite sure. Sit down. I shall be back soon.’

Rosamond returned to her chair.

‘That is better than I could have expected,’ she said.

How long did she sit there, while Mrs. Chevalier was absent? She had no idea. Nor of what she thought. One or two things came back into her mind over and over again, oftenest of all, ‘At last I have done it.’ But her thoughts had no connection. And once she looked at the stain on her hand—that nothing in the world could wash out.

Downstairs, Mrs. Chevalier was giving

orders. She had had the lodge-keeper summoned from the lodge. He was to ride at once to the village, and to learn, somehow, anyhow, what had taken place at Belmont. If he could find out nohow else, he was to go to Belmont and learn what he could from the servants there. Mrs. Chevalier feared that some one at Belmont was very ill, perhaps dying, perhaps dead ; and he must bring back word.

Also—Miss Peyton would want her room.

When she rejoined Rosamond, it was to say,

‘ You must not mind waiting a little time, for your room to be got ready.’

‘ Mrs. Chevalier, I am grateful to you beyond anything I have words to tell.’

Whilst they waited, the old woman asked a few questions about her brother. But, finding that Rosamond answered them

absently, desisted from troubling her with conversation, saying,

‘You want to think, my dear. That is right. Sit still and think. And, if you change your mind about anything, tell me.’

She herself took up a little work, and a heavy silence fell on the room.

Outside, Rosamond could hear the night wind rustling in the trees all around the house. That made her think of the previous visit to Wold. Somehow all her thoughts began to run backwards into recollections, regardless of what was to come presently—so soon.

## CHAPTER XII.

At last the room was announced as ready.

Mrs. Chevalier detained the servant, saying,

‘I want you to get,—no, wait a moment,’—she had put her hand in her pocket,—‘I must have left my keys in the other room. Come with me.’

She and the servant passed into her bed-room together.

There she asked, speaking low,

‘He has come back?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

A minute or two passed before Mrs. Chevalier rejoined Rosamond.

‘Your room is quite ready, my dear,’ she said.

Rosamond rose.

‘Shall I go now?’

‘And before you go?’

‘If you please.’

‘You have not changed your mind?’

Rosamond shook her head.

With her keys in her hand, the old woman went to a cabinet which Rosamond had never seen opened, and unlocked it. Turning her eyes away, Rosamond sat down by the table in the middle of the room.

She was pale—pale to her lips. Resting her arm on the table, she began passing her fingers nervously backwards and forwards over the cloth that covered it. She



could hear Mrs. Chevalier moving something made of glass in the cabinet ; could hear the cabinet door closed and relocked. Then she looked up. Mrs. Chevalier was coming to the table with a little glass of something colourless in her hand.

As she placed it on the table, she said,

‘Think.—It is useless to think when it is too late.’

‘I have thought.’

‘You are very young, dear,’ the old woman laid her hand on her shoulder, ‘and death is terrible. To be something that is nothing—and is cold—to have no more part in anything—to be taken away and buried.’

‘I know,’ replied Rosamond, looking around the room. ‘And—I am afraid. Help me through it.’

The old woman put down the glass on the table.

‘It will give you no pain. And it will not be yet. You will only go to sleep.’

Rosamond rose, and held out her hand for the glass.

‘Mrs. Chevalier,’ she said, pausing with it in her hand, ‘you are sure that it will not be found out; that I shall not be making trouble for you?’

‘Quite sure, dear.’

Holding the glass in her right hand, Rosamond lay her left in her hostess’s, and raised the glass to her lips.

Only to drop it again, and to rest both hand and glass on the table.

And all the while her other hand trembled in the old woman’s.

‘You must have courage, Miss Peyton.’

In an instant the glass was at her lips, and emptied.

Only, with what a look her dark eyes turned to the old woman's face; with what an agony of all her poor soul's certainty of death.

Wiping her lips she replaced the glass on the table, and, looking down, seemed for a minute to think.

When she raised her eyes again it was to say,

‘Mrs. Chevalier, I think I would rather be alone.—Something makes me wish it. If you would not mind, I would go to my room now.—Only—before I go—kiss me.’

The old woman folded her arms about her and kissed her on each cheek, and on her lips—once, twice, thrice.

Rosamond's head sunk on her shoulder.

‘Oh, Mrs. Chevalier, I wish I had been your daughter. I wish I could have lived here with you. We should have loved each other, and I should have been happy,

and should never have come to this. Only there was no alternative after what I had done this evening, and you have shown me the last kindness I shall ever receive.— Good-night, dear Mrs. Chevalier. Good-night! Good-bye !’

She was gone, and the lone woman stood looking at the door through which she had disappeared. Then she took up the empty glass, went slowly with it to the cabinet, unlocked it, and put the glass back in its place ; slowly relocked the cabinet and returned to her chair by the hearth ; slowly turned her weary face and fading eyes to the fire, and said,

‘ I have done what I could.’

Meanwhile Rosamond, taking up a light on the landing, passed along the familiar passages to her room.

A singular calm had suddenly occupied her whole being, making her almost in-

capable of concern about anything. Along with it had come an excessive acuteness of perception. Sounds of the faintest sort were clearly perceptible to her ears. Before her eyes everything ranged itself in form and colour of the sharpest intensity. She seemed to feel with every nerve in her body, and to be conscious even of the flow of the blood in her veins.

In this state of suddenly magnified consciousness she reached her room, placed her candle upon the table, and sat down.

Opposite her on the wall hung the old wood-cut of '*Der Tod als Freund*.' Its lines, and its meaning too, had become, like everything else about her, vividly, inconceivably intense, and she sat regarding it with a kind of fascination.

'Death as a friend.' She had long ago found out from Eleanor's German dictionary the meaning of its legend.

Well, that was the only friend she had left now.

She slightly changed her position.

This was a wonderful draught that Mrs. Chevalier had given her. It was affording her so strange a calm. She had perhaps not an hour to live, and yet, with death so near, she felt no distress, no fear, no shadow of that agony of dread which had assailed her as she was about to take the fatal cup into her hand. Her mind seemed to be at rest already, and only her body living on. She had no inclination to think. In fact, as she sat still, something impressed her with a notion that blank intervals divided her broken scraps of thought.

Now it appeared to her that she had been sitting for some time in absolute vacancy. That suggested a question of what the time might be. She looked at

her watch. Ten minutes past twelve. Strange that she had not heard any clocks strike !

And her hearing was so acute. Outside, the rustling of the trees in the wind was as if she could hear the movement of every individual leaf. And there was something moving about downstairs, in the room under her room. That was the breakfast-room. A man's tread! What man could it be? There were no indoor men-servants. Or, there were not when she was last at Wold. But that was certainly a man's footfall. Yes. She counted the steps. One, two, three,—six.—Then he turned—one, two——eight, nine.—Again he turned. Again, eight steps, a ninth, and then he would turn. Yes. Who could it be walking up and down, downstairs?

If there was a light in the breakfast-room, and the shutters were not closed,

she could see it on the trees. She crossed the room, and opened one of her windows.

The night air beat in her face, cool and refreshing. How refreshing!—like a new invigoration of life, which her senses felt with that same suddenly awakened sensibility.

No light was visible from the breakfast-room windows. The shutters were closed, no doubt. Because it was not likely that the man was walking up and down the room in the dark. She could still hear every step.

The villagers said Wold was haunted—if such a thing could be. To-night anything seemed possible.

She looked up at the sky. The clouds that had obscured it when she left Belmont had disappeared, and the heavens were studded with stars.



As she regarded them, a new thought broke upon her. She was seeing them for the last time. How many they were, big and little ones! And they were all counted, numbered, named. How interesting all that was! how much anyone who lived, and chose, might know about them. Not she—she had no more time to see anything, or to know anything. Most things she had already seen for the last time: her brother, and her father, all human beings: she would never see a human being again. And the trees: she could not see the trees, they were only black masses: and the flowers.

Never to see one little flower again. Not a buttercup even, nor a daisy.

Never to taste a fruit; never to smell the scent of a flower; never again to hear a human voice; never to touch any living hand.

Never to see the light of the day any more, nor the sun, nor even a shadow.

With the rush of an avalanche the length and breadth of the whole lost world, and all that it contained, burst upon her—all lost for one little draught from a wine-glass! In an instant her whole being was in revolt.

Oh, for the things that were lost!

Oh, but for one year more to see the seasons come and go. One year, only one, to know, to feel, to understand. One year! One month only; one week; one day! What a treasure of time one day! how many moments that might be filled with all the consciousness, with all the possibilities of life!

Oh, the madness of what she had done!

She might not have been arrested. That was scarcely possible. But she might have been acquitted. She might have been called

mad, or too much provoked. If she had been imprisoned, at least she would have lived.

Life ! Who that knew what they were doing would throw away life !

Could she live till the day broke, till the sun rose, and once more see the trees, and the flowers, and the light, and the shadows ? The day breaks early in June.

Mrs. Chevalier said she would sleep. She had some indefinite conviction that, had she lain down, she would have been asleep before this. The effects of narcotics could be kept at bay by movement. If she walked up and down the room, could she stave off sleep till daylight ?

It was then that it broke upon her that she was staving off sleep already ; that even here at the window, where the cool night breeze fanned her cheek, there was

some drowsiness about her which she had not felt a quarter-of-an-hour before.

What was to be done ?

‘ Only to see the light once more before I die !’

She began walking up and down the room. The movement did keep the drowsiness at bay. Yet it gained on her.

At one o’clock she was still awake.

She was awake at half-past one.

But the room was reeling around her as she struggled to continue her walk, stopping at the open window with a long breath, to charge her lungs to the full with the cooler air : and not daring to stop long lest she should fall asleep with her elbows on the window-sill.

Each time she turned her eyes to the east, but the light was not yet breaking.

When would it come for her to see it ?

‘ Only to see the light once more !’

Then she stopped suddenly.

‘ It is impossible. It cannot be. I am sleeping, I am sleeping.—Oh, if day would come sooner—only this once. This once for me to see one little bit of light. Only, it cannot be.’

Her breath was deep and slow, like the breath of a profound sleep. There was a dizziness about her, in which all the objects of the room grew troubled and dim. Her eyelids were heavy as lead, and her thoughts all in confusion.

A few steps more, whither she had no idea: whether towards the window or the sofa at the foot of the bed.

Then she clutched at something, and stood for a moment by it.

‘ I wished—what was it I wished ?’

Her eyes were closed, it was impossible longer to hold them open. But something swam before her mental vision, a picture,

an evening scene viewed from a turret window, light, and a landscape, and a sea with ships, and death that tolled a bell.

She had fallen upon one end of the sofa asleep.

On the table the candle burned slowly down to its socket, and beside it the little watch, that she had laid there, ticked on faithfully its record of the passing night. And then over her motionless form a light stole in at the window, and grew clearer, faintly at first, but ever increasing: till at last it was dawn, that dawn which she could not keep awake to see, and the world was filled with a shadowless light, in which things slowly took colour, until the red and gold burned up in the east, and the great sun arose, and poured upon her his light of life.

But she lay motionless.'

Later, a soft step sounded in the death-

still house, an uncertain step that approached slowly. A hand was laid upon the door, and it opened.

It was Mrs. Chevalier.

She did not immediately notice the figure fallen in a heap on the end of the sofa. When she saw it, she stood for a minute or more regarding it, studying the position in which the girl had fallen. Then she looked at the open window through which the morning sunlight streamed into the room, and said, half aloud,

‘ Ah !’

Coming to where the girl lay, she bent over her and kissed her, once, on the forehead.

She went back to the door, and then stopped again looking at the motionless figure on the sofa.†

‘ I shall never see her again !’

But in her weary face so pale and stony there was relief, as she returned with slow, uncertain steps to her own room, a look of relief, as if, after all, some great task that had been almost beyond her strength was accomplished.



## CHAPTER XIII.

‘ I HAVE dreamed.—Or, I have been delirious.—I have walked in my sleep.—I was at Wold.—Where is that picture? The palmer in the turret chamber, and death?—But I know this room too? This *is* Wold—The library.—Who are you?—Why are you here?—You are Mr. Jaffray.—Am I dreaming still—or only dizzy?’

Octavius Jaffray caught her, for she had risen from the ottoman in the library upon which they had placed her, and nearly fell.

Supported in his arms she rambled on, as if still but semi-conscious, looking around the room with bewildered eyes.

‘This is the library,—it was not here.—Is this really day? I am awake again: not dreaming?—Only, how is it that you are here?—Last night—it was last night—Mrs. Chevalier——’

He stopped her.

‘Hush!’

She obeyed, staring at him for a moment, as if his injunction was unintelligible, and then again surveying the room.

Whilst she did so, he gently led her to a chair and made her sit down.

‘Sit there a minute, and convince yourself that you are awake. Think.—Remember all you can, all that happened last night—only, do not speak.’

He himself crossed to one of the win-

dows, and stood looking out with his back to her.

So passed a few minutes. Then he came back again.

‘ You have thought ? ’

‘ Yes. ’

‘ Can you remember anything now ? ’

‘ Yes. But I do not understand.—Last night——’

‘ Hush ! ’

She looked up at him.

‘ How do you come to be here ? ’

He laid his finger on his lips, then explained with a smile,

‘ My destiny brought me here. ’

‘ You have come from Belmont. ’

And she paled.

‘ No. If you can keep a secret that is worth more than one life forget as soon as you leave this house that you have even seen me here. ’

‘ I am to leave here ?’

She spoke with apprehension.

‘ Presently. Listen.—If you feel equal now to giving me your attention.’—Rosamond bent her head in assent.—‘ Just now you were going to tell me of something that happened here last night. I know all about that. You need not tell me.’

‘ You know ?’

Taking a chair, he seated himself at her side.

‘ I know all. Marmaduke Torres——’

Rosamond turned away her head.

‘ Is alive.’

‘ Alive !—Oh !’

She had started up from her seat. But the next instant her voice dropped.

‘ It is impossible,’ she said.

‘ No. He—met with an accident last night—that is what they say at Belmont—

but not of a fatal kind, happily. There is no doubt that he will recover.'

A minute she stood regarding him, with her cheek flushing, and her breath coming short and quick. Then throwing herself again upon the chair beside him, and taking his hands, she asked,

'You are not deceiving me? You are sure that you are not deceiving me—that he is still alive?'

'He is alive, and will recover.'

'Then I did not kill him?'

'Who said that you killed him?'

'You said that you knew everything.'

For reply, he took one of the young hands that lay in his, and with his finger pointed to a little spot upon it.

'It will wash out, after all,' he said.

A minute the girl sat looking into his eyes. Then her head fell on his shoulder.

‘Come, come,’ he said, after allowing her a little time to recover herself, ‘destinies are destinies—we cannot avoid them. Now, sit there, and listen to me, and I will tell you all about it.—When you came here last night, Mrs. Chevalier sent a messenger at once to the village, with instructions to go on, if necessary, to Belmont, and to find out all that he could. He came back having managed to see some of your servants, from whom he had learned that Torres had left the drawing-room with you. Some three-quarters-of-an-hour afterwards, when Mr. Peyton, wishing to speak to him, sent to find him, they could not at first make out where he was. But Mrs. Peyton herself at last discovered him in the library lying on the floor. Your step-mother is a woman of resources, my dear.’

‘She is an odious woman, and I hate her. It was all her doing. I always felt

certain that she would make trouble for me.'

'H'm!'—he had risen, and began walking up and down as he continued,—'I am afraid there is no sense in antipathies, my dear. We are—what we cannot help being—such as our parents brought us into the world: what sense is there in our quarrelling about what cannot be helped? Then you will reply that we cannot help our antipathies either. In which, I suppose, you would be right. Only, just at present I am telling you that the person that found Torres—he was lying on the library floor near the window—was your step-mother. He—had cut himself—somehow—that was what the servants said—rather badly. So Mrs. Peyton sent at once for the doctor. And the doctor agreed—that he had cut himself rather badly, but that he had fallen in a position

that prevented the bleeding from being very severe—you see, the fates decide these things, my dear—and that with proper care he would recover. Mrs. Peyton did not say much to her guests about what had happened—because, you see, it is always as well not to frighten people. A woman of resources, your step-mother, my dear. And your father found some excuse for Torres's not returning to the drawing-room.'

'What did they think?'

'Who?'

'Mamma and the doctor?'

'I cannot tell you that. It was not likely that they would tell the servants what they thought, was it? And, you see, the servants knew very little, only that Mr. Torres had—cut himself rather badly, but was getting on quite satisfactorily. I



tell you, Mrs. Peyton is a woman of resources.'

He continued,

' But I have not yet told you all. When this information reached Mrs. Chevalier, she sent a little note to your step-mother. That was to tell her that you were at Wold—very much excited and upset about something Mrs. Chevalier said ; you seemed so much upset that Mrs. Chevalier was going to keep you with her for the night—because she thought that would be best for you ; and that you would return home in the morning, if Mrs. Peyton would be so kind as to send for you. Mrs. Chevalier is also a woman of resources. Ah, yes ! Mrs. Chevalier *is* a woman of resources !'

' Then mamma knows that I am here ?'

' Yes.'

' And that you are here ?'

‘No.—No one knows that I am here. And you, my dear, mind that you do not tell them.’

‘You were here last night?’

‘Yes.’

Rosamond was wondering whether he was the person whom she had heard walking up and down. Probably.

‘Was that *all* that Mrs. Chevalier told you?’ she asked, with a shade of hesitation.

‘Not all—there was something else.’

‘About me?’

‘About you. But you do not want me to tell you about what you did yourself, I suppose.’

‘When I believed that I had killed Marmaduke, I resolved to destroy myself. I should have drowned myself——’

‘If it had been your fate.’

‘You know that Mrs. Chevalier per-

suaded me to let her give me something instead.'

'Quite so. Only ;'—he came to her, and, sitting beside her, took her hand.—  
'I presume, my dear, that it did not occur to you to think what giving people something that takes them into another world, before their time, is called. I mean;—  
Rosamond was looking hard at him,—  
'your opinion of Mrs Chevalier is not one that would lead you to suppose her a woman addicted to practice of that kind?'

'I love her,' replied the girl, promptly.  
'Had my case been what I supposed, that would have been a kindly action.'

'A right one?'

'And a right one,' asserted Rosamond, promptly.

'To assist you to destroy yourself. Last night, when you were convinced that you

had killed your lover; and, also, that, with Mrs. Chevalier's assistance, you had destroyed yourself, you were perfectly satisfied with what you had done, and——'

Rosamond had risen, and put her hand on his lips.

'Never speak of it,' she said, 'there are agonies so awful that it is sacrilege only to name them.'

Turning away from him, she passed to one of the tables, and sat down covering her face with her hands.

'We brought you in here,' said Octavius Jaffray, when she at last moved, 'partly to help you through the surprise of your awakening: and partly because the position in which you had fallen on the sofa looked so particularly uncomfortable. And, so now I think you understand all about it.'

‘ I understand that it was only by accident that I did not last night commit two wilful murders, that I am every whit as guilty as if I had succeeded in both of them ; one of the most criminal women in the world.’

She stood at a distance from him, haggard and shamed, with something unnatural in the appearance of her evening dress in the morning light, and looking as if she felt herself exactly what she had said.

‘ And I can only ask myself,’ she added, ‘ whether Mrs. Chevalier did not make a mistake in interposing to save me. There can be no human being mad enough to have, after this, anything to do with me.’

‘ Well, there is still the river.’

There was a touch of sublimity in the look of pain with which she answered,

‘ You do not know what you are saying.’

But the old man spoke gently,

‘ You must not be discouraged. No one should ever allow themselves to be discouraged. What has happened was your destiny. Our characters and our lives drive us. There was some strain in you over which you had no control. Now, perhaps, it has spent its forces. Suppose it has. Then you are not worse than before, but better. Those who have really loved you will love you still. We will talk of all these things afterwards. Come now, and think about having some breakfast. I will wait for you downstairs.’

She allowed herself to be persuaded, saying,

‘ You are always kind.’

‘ A destiny, my dear. That is all.’

During breakfast, they found themselves alone with no one to wait upon them. She was taciturn. Only, towards the end of the meal, she remarked,

‘Before I leave, I must see Mrs. Chevalier.’

‘I think not,’ replied Octavius Jaffray at once.

‘She will not be able to see me?’

‘Not to-day.’

‘She has been ill, I could see: and my coming last night over-tasked her strength?’

‘No.—Not that. Only, you must not think of seeing her. Mrs. Peyton will send for you, before Mrs. Chevalier could very well see you.’

Rosamond acquiesced, wondering at his evident familiarity with the house and its customs.

‘When I reach Belmont, I must see Mr.

Torres,' she said. 'I wonder what he will say to me? He is engaged to Eleanor now. That was how it all happened. It is mamma's doing.'

'My dear girl,' remarked the old bachelor, 'if Torres *is* engaged to Eleanor—you are very well rid of him. Besides, you know, it is absolute unreason to think of marrying a man who is fated to be the husband of some one else.'

When they had done breakfast, he detained her a moment to say,

'Listen, my dear. I am going to Belmont. Mrs. Peyton will send for you about eleven, and orders have been given at the lodge for the trap to come up to the house. You will find that Mrs. Peyton will send you another frock—oh, she is a woman of resources, your step-mother. So you will get home very comfortably. But I want to tell you that, when you are



driving home, you will overtake me—on my way to Belmont. You understand, don't you?—on my way from the station to the house, to pay your father a visit. If there is room for me in the trap, of course you will pick me up, and take me with you, our destinies having brought us together on the road.'

The destinies alluded to did bring them together on the road: and on this occasion Mr. Jaffray might have been with justice accused of having taken destiny in tow for his own benefit and that of his god-daughter; but, probably, could have demonstrated, at least to his own satisfaction, that he had done nothing of the kind; after the fashion of many other people whose firm faith in their own principles places no impediment in the way of their working their principles for their own ends, whenever that course proves expedient. Any-

how, Rosamond and the old gentleman arrived at Belmont together, and, as the former was too discreet to remember that she had seen Mr. Jaffray at Wold, the question of destiny or no destiny occasioning their *rencontre* did not arise.

The arrival of Mr. Jaffray no doubt assisted to facilitate the circumstances of Rosamond's return : but when she joined the rest of the party at luncheon it did not appear that she had been much missed. After all, she had been absent only from the breakfast-table ; and there was enough going on in the house to occupy the attention of the guests without their being particularly curious concerning the absence of one member of the family from one meal. On the other hand, everyone was making enquiries respecting Marmaduke Torres. From them Rosamond gathered that he was supposed to have slipped and fallen

with a large knife in his hand, which, getting somehow caught underneath him, as he fell, had given him an awkward wound on the breast. It is needless to say that the enquiries concerning his progress were provided with the ordinary accompaniment of stereotyped remarks, 'Might have been fatal.'—'Quite providential!'—'So dangerous to carry an open knife!' *etc.*; whilst one man was telling a history of a friend of his who had been killed by falling in a similar way upon a carving-fork.

She could not at the time help reflecting that the medical man must have views of his own on the subject.

But Florence had undeniably managed the awkward incident which had taken place with very considerable skill. The only remark she made respecting it to Rosamond, on her return, was,

‘I suppose, Rosamond, that we may just as well say nothing about what occurred last night.’

To which Mr. Jaffray, whom destiny had occasioned to be standing by, replied for Rosamond,

‘Much better say nothing, my dear Mrs. Peyton : much better.’

‘I cannot make mamma out,’ said Rosamond to Mr. Jaffray, as soon as they were left alone together. ‘She is so pleased at her success at keeping her secret—or I suppose I should say mine—that she does not seem to care much about what has happened : and yet she is tremendously put out about something.’

‘Only, under the circumstances, my dear, the two do not seem incompatible,’ remarked Mr. Jaffray, with a good deal of reason.

Later on, Mr. Peyton sent for her to speak with him in private.

He was under no misapprehension about what had the previous evening taken place in the library. But, to Rosamond's surprise, he spoke to her kindly: seemed very sorry for her: and was more nearly affectionate with her than she could remember his ever having been before—with the consequence that she cried.

Upon which he laid his hand paternally on her shoulder, and said,

‘Well: let this be a lesson to you, my dear.’

Was she not Lennox's sister; and did he not owe Lennox more than he could possibly repay?

And Rosamond asked to see Marmaduke Torres.

‘I must see him, papa; though I do not

know what I can say to him, nor what he will have to say to me.'

Mr. Peyton, at whom she was not looking, smiled.

'You shall see him as soon as he can see anyone,' he said. 'But just at present he must be kept very quiet.'

But yet another surprise awaited her, on that day of surprises.

Eleanor was not at home to luncheon, and came in to afternoon tea.

One of the first things she said to Rosamond was,

'As you do not congratulate me, dear, I suppose you have not heard.'

Rosamond was conscious of the blood rushing to her heart. It was with a voice almost choking that she replied,

'You can hardly expect me to congratulate you, can you?'

'What, you too!' exclaimed Eleanor,

widening her blue-grey eyes. 'Then by accepting the Major I have got into disgrace with everyone.'

Rosamond, who had already risen to leave her, with difficulty stifling her indignation, suddenly stopped and confronted her.

'The Major!' she exclaimed, unable to believe her ears. 'You are engaged to the Major!'

'He proposed to me yesterday, and I accepted him.'

Rosamond dropped into a chair.

'This becomes inexplicable,' she said.

'I fail to see what it is that all of you find so inexplicable,' remarked Eleanor, distinctly huffed. 'Dear uncle is as much put out as if I had somehow disappointed him; aunt is positively *angry*; and now you look as much surprised as if you had been shot.'

Rosamond had it on her lips to say, 'But last night Marmaduke told me that you were engaged to him!' Only, she did not say it.

'I am sure that I cannot see that any of you have anything to be surprised at, at all,' Eleanor meanwhile continued. 'Bob and I have the same tastes; we liked each other at first sight; and, all the time that he has been down here, we have been drawing and sketching together. Anyhow, Rosamond, I am going to marry him, that is *certain*.'

'Under those circumstances, might I enquire why you have been all the time flirting with Mr. Torres?' asked Rosamond, managing her voice and temper with difficulty, but somehow managing them.

Eleanor laughed.

'My dear, it is not on these occasions



the *lady's* cue to show her preference,' she replied, with the air of an accomplished coquette. 'Besides, I did not want aunty to send Bob away.'

'I see,' remarked Rosamond, shortly; and added, 'You are perfectly welcome, my dear, to marry Major Torres for anything I care. Pray assure him of my sincerest—commiseration.'

But Eleanor only laughed.

'I am sure I ought to feel *awfully* flattered: you seem, all of you, so put out at the idea of parting with 'me.'

Thought Rosamond to herself,

'Now I see what has displeased mamma. She likes events to take the course which she has designed for them, and Eleanor's marrying Major Torres was no part at all of her programme. And papa is disappointed in his adored niece. That serves him right.'

Whosoever might be displeased or disappointed, it was plain that Major Bob and Eleanor were both superlatively contented. Eleanor had escaped from playing second fiddle, a part to which she was not at all accustomed, and the Major had found himself a wife whose fortune would more than counterbalance the expense to which she was likely to put him—also a very good wife; one who would be always bright, always in a good humour, and with no idea of existence beyond conforming herself to her husband's good pleasure.

Two days elapsed before Rosamond was allowed to see Marmaduke Torres. He was not then allowed yet to sit up, but was lying on a sofa. As she came into the room, he made a sign to the nurse, who was attending upon him, to leave them together.

Rosamond he received with a smile, partly of amusement.

‘Oh, Marmaduke!’

That was all she said, as she bent her lips to his, without needing to be told that he wished it.

‘You might have allowed me time to explain that, when I said Eleanor was already engaged, I meant to the Major,’ he said, still smiling. ‘Only, after this, you know you must marry me.’

‘The question is, Marmaduke, whether you can care to marry me. You have seen what I am now,’—she had sunk on her knees by the side of his sofa,—‘and I have no excuse to offer for myself.’

But all the time whilst she spoke she could see the love in his eyes going out to her, and his hand was taking her hand captive.

‘Nonsense! who wants excuses?’ he

replied, in his easy way. ‘It was a nasty dig, but, after all, no harm came of it. You are mine by a sort of right of conquest now, and I am going to marry you. We shall understand each other. I shall never find any other girl like you; and you will believe that after this.’

## CHAPTER XIV.

‘READ the letter.’

Octavius Jaffray handed the document in question to Mr. Peyton. They were talking in Mr. Peyton’s private room.

The letter was from Mrs. Chevalier. She was very ill, and begged that Mr. Jaffray would come and see her. The envelope was addressed to him at Belmont, with ‘Please forward immediately,’ written in the corner.

‘I had no idea that you knew her,’ said Mr. Peyton, returning the letter.

‘I knew her many, many years ago—before her marriage. Her father was a friend of mine. I suppose that she writes to me simply because she has no other friends left, or does not know where to find them.’

‘I believe that, since she has lived at Wold, she has seen no one except her medical man and the rector.’

‘Indeed! No one except her medical man and the rector,’ echoed Octavius Jaffray. ‘I suppose she must have heard from one or other of them that I have been sometimes staying with you.’

‘You will go and see her?’

‘Requests of this sort cannot be refused.’

Mr. Peyton agreed with that; and so Mr. Jaffray set out for Wold.

That was in the morning. He came back before dinner. Their conjectures had proved correct. It was from the

rector that Mrs. Chevalier had heard of Mr. Jaffray's visits to Belmont. But it was only a day or two since, when she was taken ill—though it seemed that her health had been failing for some time—that she asked the rector some questions about him which had led her to the conclusion that he must be the Mr. Jaffray whom she had once known. She then told the rector that she should write to him. She had long since lost sight of all her friends, but would like to see one of them before she died. Mr. Jaffray had seen her solicitor at Wold, as well as the rector, and the medical man. Mrs. Chevalier had expressed some wish that Mr. Jaffray should remain at Wold until her death, and the three professional men had urged him to do so. Should no other friend of Mrs. Chevalier's appear, it would be a satisfaction to them—the rector, the doctor, and

lawyer—that the one friend whom Mrs. Chevalier had known where to find had been with her at the time of her death. Neither lawyer, nor doctor, nor rector had known anything of her before she came to Wold.

And so Mr. Jaffray packed up his small luggage and went to Wold.

Mrs. Chevalier was dying, but the end came slowly, and she lived four days after his arrival. She would have no one to attend upon her except her housekeeper. But the housekeeper could do easily all that was required: and when the other men were out of the house she would send the housekeeper with a message to Mr. Jaffray to come and sit with her for an hour or two.

The second day after his arrival she recalled the solicitor, and was engaged



with him for about an hour. After he had left, she said to Mr. Jaffray,

‘I have re-made my will, Octavius. Its terms are exactly the same as before, only its having been made to-day, since you have been here, will help very much to explain it. I am still, you see,—she smiled her poor thin smile,—‘doing all I can. I must leave the rest for you to do.’

‘You may rely upon its being done.’

‘I know I can, Octavius.’

The third day she was much weaker, and could scarcely speak. In the evening, after Mr. Jaffray had left her, the house-keeper came to him in the boudoir, where he now generally sat, in order to be at hand if he should be wanted.

‘I think mis’ss is wandering, sir. I cannot understand what she says. Perhaps you would come, sir.’

Octavius Jaffray had already risen from his chair, and followed her into the sick-room.

The sick woman was murmuring feebly. In the midst of it, Mr. Jaffray caught indistinctly the name of 'Mrs. Peyton.'

'You cannot make out what she is saying?' he asked the housekeeper.

'No, sir. I listened, but I could not understand at all.'

'Nothing? Did she not name anyone?'

'Not that I could hear, sir. I could only hear that she was talking.'

'I will see if I can hear.'

He went nearer to the bed, and listened. It was only every now and then that the sick woman spoke.

Presently turning to the housekeeper, he said, 'I understand. She wants to tell me something. Go into the other room. I will ring if I want you.'

The housekeeper left, and he sat down by the bed, on the side nearer the door by which the housekeeper had quitted the room. That was not the best position for hearing what the dying woman was saying : but it was the best position for watching that no one else heard it.

She spoke only every now and then, in broken sentences, apparently always in imagined conversation with some one, whose replies she perhaps heard in a dream.

Octavius Jaffray listened—listened and understood.

‘The woman is a fool, and her mother is a fool to help her.—But she has set her mind of a fool upon it.—She will do it somehow.—And she may as well help us.’

‘They know nothing about who we are. I gave a false name.’

‘The child will be cared for.’

‘Of course you do not like it, but the child will be well cared for.’

‘Octavius Jaffray knows them. He will be able to tell us how they treat the child.’

‘We must take precautions that Mr. Peyton shall not discover.—You do not suppose, do you, that she will tell him?’

‘Are you not always saying, “Where will there be a place in the world for the child?” And now we have found one.’

‘You must decide—I have decided already.’

After that a long interval ensued, during which she did not speak, though she was restless, as if her mind was engaged in something arduous. Then again a word or two would escape her that was, perhaps, only a part of what she was saying in her dream.

‘Where is she staying with her mother?’

‘We can trust the nurse.’

‘I have sent for the doctor.’

And once she again named Mrs. Peyton, and several times dropped the single word ‘mother.’

Afterwards came another pause, and then she was again in imagination evidently holding a conversation.

‘There are twins.’

‘They are both fine children.—A boy and a girl. The boy is the elder.’

‘You must take both, or neither.’

Then she said many times, as if disputing a point with some one,

‘Both, or neither.’—‘It must be both, or neither.’—‘No : both, or neither.’

And, after a longer pause,

‘I have made her take both.’

‘They will be well cared for, dear.’

At last she said,

‘She is dying. She does not understand.’

And she repeated many times, ‘I have done what I could. I have done what I could.’ But that less as if addressing anyone than as if speaking to herself.

Then the long dream, if it was a dream, was ended. She seemed to place herself in a more comfortable position, and slept peacefully.

Octavius Jaffray still watched by the bed-side for a little while, and then rang for the housekeeper.

‘She speaks with difficulty,’ he said, ‘and it takes her a long time to say what she means. Now she has fallen into a deep sleep. If she again becomes restless and speaks, fetch me at once.’

The woman did not come to him. Mrs. Chevalier slept peacefully all through the night.

About nine she awoke. Her mind was much clearer than on the previous day. In the course of the morning she talked to Octavius Jaffray for nearly half-an-hour.

‘I have done what I could, Octavius,’ she said. ‘I have done what I could,—for them all. I think it will be all right now.—Tell the girl I sent her my love.—I cannot send a message to the lad. He would not understand. Say nothing to him. When I am gone, there will be no one left who knows. I trust all the rest to you. A long time has been given me. I needed a long time, Octavius. The things I had to learn were hard. But time was given—mercifully. And I have learned to be resigned—and to forgive. My son’s wife might have saved him, if she had listened to me. But I have learned to forgive—and to be resigned.’

After that, she slept again, but Octavius

still remained in the room. About noon she opened her eyes for a few minutes, and asked,

‘Is that you, Octavius?’

‘It is I.’

She gave him her hand, and said,

‘I am glad—I wanted you.’

She had apparently become unconscious that he had been in the house for the last four days.

And looking up at him again, she said,

‘My old friend!’

Those were the last words she spoke; for, immediately closing her eyes, she again fell asleep, leaving her hand in his, and in her sleep passed away, still with her hand in her faithful ‘boy-friend’s’ hand, lent her, not to pass over the summer brook, but to cross the great river.



After the funeral, Octavius Jaffray returned to Belmont. Mrs. Chevalier had left some legacies to her servants, and one to the rector. All the rest of her property was bequeathed to him. She had no relations.

‘What will you do with Wold, Mr. Jaffray?’ was the first question Rosamond asked, as soon as she heard the news.

‘So long as the fates permit, I shall live there.’

‘Will you make any alterations?’

‘None: except to keep the lawns in order. So long as I live, Wold will remain exactly as Mrs. Chevalier left it me. I shall leave it to your brother and you.’

‘To my brother and me!’

‘I am an old bachelor, you see, and, like Mrs. Chevalier, have no relations. So Wold will be for you and your brother.’

That was one of the things Florence never understood, why Octavius was resolved to leave Wold to Rosamond and her brother.

‘He has no relations,’ explained her husband. ‘He is one of my very oldest and most intimate friends. The children are his god-children, and have been always attached to him; and it seems to me that he is simply behaving very handsomely.’

But Florence never understood.

He had taken up his residence at Wold before the end of the month, and one of Rosamond’s and Marmaduke’s first outings beyond the limits of Belmont was to pay him a visit.

So Marmaduke’s curiosity about the locality of his father’s death was after all gratified.

As they were walking through the picture-gallery, Rosamond stopped him before one of the pictures.

‘When I was staying here,’ she said, ‘I used to look at that portrait, and to wonder whom it resembled. I am sure that it is like some face I know.’

‘Rather,’ replied Marmaduke.

He was laughing at her.

‘Then tell me—who is it like?’

‘Yourself—or what you would have been if you had been a man. It is the image of you. I could have imagined your brother being like that had he been taller and handsomer.’

‘The eyes are like Lennox’s eyes.’

‘They are a great deal more like yours.’

He turned to Mr. Jaffray, and asked,

‘Whose portrait is that?’

‘I do not know,’ replied Mr. Jaffray, promptly.

If he spoke the truth, his remembrance of the man who had handed pretty Annie Littleton over the brook was much feebler

than his recollection of Annie Littleton herself. It is likely enough it was so.

‘The resemblance is really remarkable,’ observed Marmaduke.

‘The caprices of nature produce these resemblances,’ replied Mr. Jaffray. ‘They are often but the fleeting accidents of a year or two. I would wager that neither of you can tell me who that is.’

He pointed to the portrait of a handsome girl in another part of the room, saying,

‘Guess, if you can.’

They could neither of them guess.

‘That,’ he said, ‘is Mrs. Chevalier.’

‘Impossible, Mr. Jaffray!’ exclaimed Rosamond.

‘It is the image of Mrs. Chevalier when she was Annie Littleton, when I first knew her. You see how much reliance can be placed upon resemblances.’

Rosamond and Marmaduke were married in the autumn, and Eleanor and the Major on the same day, the latter taking up their residence at Belmont, and the former with Mrs. Torres in London; where, after all, Rosamond did not turn out so uncongenial a companion to the quiet, good-natured old lady as Florence had imagined. At Belmont the artistic Major still continues to find life an expensive affair, but his wife's money assists to meet his liabilities. The Major's celebrated picture, 'Neglected,' was finally purchased by Octavius Jaffray and hung in the picture-gallery at Wold, where its locality among the members of Mrs. Chevalier's family may be accounted for as one of the caprices of destiny.

This history has only two other events to mention. Some six months after Rosamond's marriage, Mrs. Peyton presented

Mr. Peyton with an heir—this time, though the portrait was for the present on a very small scale, the image of himself. At which Mrs. Peyton was pleased.

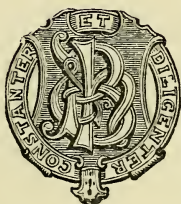
And a year later, amidst the soft glow of tapers, with the scent of the incense hanging in the air, a prelate in gorgeous pontificals placed in Lennox Peyton's hand the sacred chalice and paten with the sacramental words,

‘Receive the power to offer sacrifice.’

The power to offer sacrifice—the greatest of prerogatives—to suffer that others may rejoice—to atone that others may be forgiven!

THE END.

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